

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL



26°

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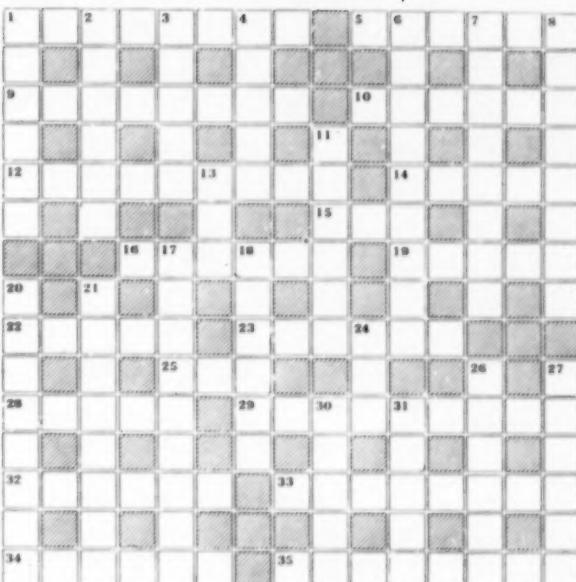
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ACROSS

- Get along as an egg might (8).
- Le chic literary tag (6).
- A cask in genuine surroundings (8).
- When grandfather strikes (6).
- Sharp repose near the Sunday joint (two words: 5, 4).
- This is not nice (5).
- Kind of 5 across (3).
- Chaperone is proper on backward girl (6).
- Parts, or revolves, we hear (5).
- Brother starts decent (5).
- As then it's capital (6).
- One may be an age (3).
- Monkey goes to the wall abroad (5).
- Legal coin for scholar (9).
- In corrupt surroundings I am pardonable (6).
- His opponent had a circular top piece (8).
- Yield after account to come forward (6).
- Minded about shillings and embraced (8).



Composed by JOAN BENYON

24

DOWN

- Does he pat gently in the boat? (6).
- Guiding rule starts with friction (6).
- Remit the headgear (5).
- Contract the easel (5).
- Behold bird, smile—you must know his wedding music (9).
- Bodice with lonely ending (8).
- Lamb, perhaps (8).
- Connect just short of ambassadorial official (6).
- Regretful herb (3).

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Entries must arrive not later than the 15th December.

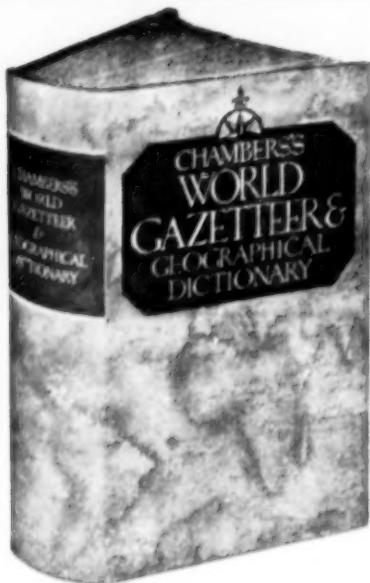
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THE INDEX. The value and scope of the

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The Aunts

MARGARET HAMMEL

A FEW days after Christmas, when, at the town dump, I was unloading my car of boxes and wrappings that could not be salvaged for any purpose another year, I came upon a carton of indescribable shabbiness. I looked at it with distaste, and then sharp resentment, for it had been sent to my daughters by a frugal and unimaginative relative. Its contents were of an order usually earmarked for a deserving family of growing children.

Now, as everyone should know, children do little else but grow and outgrow, and one of the first things they outgrow is an enthusiasm for the practical gift—say a heavy tan muffler that is only slightly moth-eaten, or a used game of authors with *Pickwick Papers* and *Idylls of the King* for some reason or other missing.

Soberly, I began to trace the lineal ancestry of my anger. With triumphant speed, I arrived at Aunt Kate.

I suppose every family has, like its dominant and recessive characteristics, an Aunt Kate and an Aunt Lucy. For years I hadn't thought of either of them, they both having gone to their ultimate and, I'm sure, quite different

rewards years ago. The shabby carton I pitched into the town dump started me thinking of the aunts and Christmas forty years ago.

AUNT KATE, who impressed my mind with the ineradicable stamp of a birthmark, married a man in hardware in 1906. For years I thought of hardware as some harshly-abrasive suiting worn next the skin, which perhaps contributed to Aunt Kate's twitching irritability. She had a supreme advantage over all her sisters, including my mother, in that she had a commanding voice, had married well—and too late to be harassed by children.

Her house was full of liver-coloured mahogany which I was not allowed to touch because of my oil-glands. I used to study my palms and elbows with awe, looking for oil seepages, on the rare occasions we were asked to Aunt Kate's for a Sunday roast.

'Can't the child find anything to do?' Aunt Kate would ask after we had partaken lightly of the roast and returned hungry to the liver parlour. She had a passion for the intimate

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details of hard childbirth among mother's friends, and nothing delighted her more, her own innards at peace with a pound of rare beef, than to listen to distressing accounts of other women's suffering.

'Doesn't she ever read!' Aunt Kate would cry out again, irked beyond endurance by the spastic behaviour of my hands now confined to the uninteresting area of my lap. She would whip out a piece of cambric from between her breasts, apply it to her already glittering eyeglasses, and take a fresh look at the squirming child who must be banished somehow. Then mother would declare that I was a great reader, and Aunt Kate, releasing a sigh that spread like an eddying wind, would press a gritty volume of Scottish history into my hands and summarily push me out to the back sitting-room.

I never learned much about Bannockburn, for I was a tireless eavesdropper, an occupation that carried grave, even traumatic, risks, though I wasn't aware of them at the time. In eavesdropping at Aunt Kate's I picked up a rich vocabulary on breech births and forceps deliveries, which later established my reputation in school cloakrooms as a raconteur par excellence. However, I also learned that I was shallow. My four brothers were so pink and white, and what a terrible pity for a girl to have poor colouring. Had my mother tried cold neck-baths in the morning to bring the blood to the face? Terrified, believing that some nameless disease was already having its way with me, I would stare, fascinated, at a mirror, wondering how or where or what was shallow.

I paid an extortive price for Aunt Kate's Sunday roast. She had to be kissed. Unlike my pink and white brothers, I was not an indiscriminate kisser and had developed at an early age the unendearing habit of wiping my mouth after an unsolicited embrace. I particularly dreaded kissing Aunt Kate. She had a pale, raised mole on her chin, and out of it curled a single whisker, a crisp, coiled wire that struck me with the fatal thrust of a harpoon. For days before a visit to her I disciplined myself against flinching by pretending that hornets, woodpeckers, and what we used to call darning-needles had come to rest on my mouth, only to find it stone.

Her 'chest', too, was formidable. It projected like a tray on a baby's high-chair and could give you a smart whack if you didn't incline yourself at a safe angle over it.

YOU can say I was already physically prejudiced against Aunt Kate, and had she given me rainbows at Christmas, it wouldn't have mattered. But this was not the truth. I forgave everyone everything at Christmas, so long as the package rattled when shaken, so long as it was queer-shaped, like a hockey stick, so long as it smelled of chocolate or pistachio.

On Christmas Eve my mother's family gathered at our house. Aunt Kate would arrive first, for it was a cardinal point of honour with her to be over-punctual. Her husband, Uncle Henry, would follow close behind like a trained thing on a short leash, and it was he who carried the carton festively held together by hairy twine.

Hope dies late in children, for they don't understand the immutable patterns of behaviour. I always hoped that one Christmas Uncle Henry would come bearing gift-wrapped packages tied with balsam spills or jingling with bells or looped with extravagant twists of ribbon. That never happened. All our presents from Aunt Kate were packed like donations to a rummage-sale. Her generosity overflowed when at times she added mothballs as a preservative to the contents.

She would sit in the best chair near the fire, head high above the shelf of her bosom, an apricot cordial in her strong fingers, and await with simmering impatience the arrival of other relatives. Every so often she would glance admiringly at her carton under the tree, just as if it were an ermine cape hanging carelessly from a princess's shoulder. I would be dispatched to sit with her while mother put the baby brothers to bed. I dreaded this assignment, for, like the annual carton, then came the annual lecture on my posture.

It was abhorrent to her. Adding to the disfigurement of sloped shoulders, never seen in Aunt Kate's family, I increased the stigma by 'slumping'. 'You should always sit,' Aunt Kate would adjure me, 'as if you were smelling a rose on your chest. That's better! Head high, chin under, back lifted. Now, *smell!*' And I would sit painfully smelling the invisible rose, until a light step on the porch sent me dashing to welcome Aunt Lucy.

AUNT LUCY always came in with snow like stars on her eyelashes. She carried silver and gold, red and green packages like a barbaric necklace around her throat. She had

THE AUNTS

a laugh like cascading bells and, because she kissed us so exuberantly, she invariably dropped things in the front hall—her gaudy packages, her beaver hat with the pearl hatpin, her perfumed white-fox fur-piece. The men-folk rushed like fresh troops to her rescue, while Aunt Kate sat tapping one black polished shoe and working her mouth into the classic lines of censure.

Aunt Lucy was the youngest in a large family, a kind of afterthought of my grandparents' middle years, and had been so greatly indulged that perhaps the root-system of her character was sacrificed to the fine pretty blooms of her personality. She worked in a bespoke dress-shop, took dinners with strange men (some with foreign names) in restaurants at a time when all decorous women dined only with relatives or married friends. My eavesdropping had informed me that money burned holes in her pocket, that she'd rue the day, that she'd die in a poorhouse without a fair-weather friend to her name.

Instead of regarding these dour prophecies with a respect due the ominous tone of their delivery, I laid plans to model my life after Aunt Lucy's. I especially wanted fair-weather friends—they sounded like picnics on mossy hills and like leapfrog games after an August moon comes up. And besides, wasn't it true that the men, usually falling over themselves to escape to the kitchen for whisky and smokes, stood by when Aunt Lucy arrived, polluting the air and soiling the curtains with their pipe-smoke, laughing and teasing her, and surprising their wives and themselves with bursts of wit and gaiety?

No wonder.

Aunt Lucy wore wonderful shoes, and when she walked, she rustled. She smelled like a bed of sweet-william after a summer shower. Her 'chest' was soft and yielding, her dark hair spindrift and escaping. At our house she always sat on the floor in preference to a chair and gave quick, impulsive hugs to our many dogs. She loved cats and dogs, babies and birds. She played the mandolin with a tortoise-shell pick; and when she sang, I wept with joyful unrestraint, for her songs were about lovers and warriors who died on the far side of a distant green hill. Uncles who hadn't sung since last Christmas accompanied her with plaintive baritone sounds. Their eyes grew round and misty; their pipes went out.

It was only at these times that I, watchful and silent on the needle-point footstool by the

upright piano, could imagine my father and uncles a little less old than God. Some inexpressible grief would fill me—akin to the emotions aroused by Aunt Lucy's songs—when I thought of these men reduced to parlour-size now and all the engagements of love and heroism behind them for ever.

'You say,' Aunt Kate would speak up in her loud, clear-syllabled voice above the tortoise-shell picking and men's chorus, 'you say the baby can't hold his feedings?' And though she was apparently answering my mother's remark, she would bend a fraught, unwinking eye upon Uncle Henry's enraptured face. 'Have you tried one-part lime-water?'

Even at Christmas parties she talked about cold-water starch versus hot-water starch, about worming dogs (filthy things), and about second mortgages. She found it intolerable, the only woman of substance in the family, to receive divided attention and to watch the flushed faces of the men doting on silly Lucy, caressing a dog on the Axminster rug. 'Lucy!' she would finally cry out. 'Your skirt!—much as if Lucy's skirt had caught sudden fire.

Aunt Lucy would smile and stop stroking the besotted dog's neck. Looking down at an inch of silken leg showing above her high-laced suede shoes, she would give her skirt a careless toss, which succeeded only in disclosing the white eyelet flounce of her petticoat.

How she thrilled me after the winter-stockinged Aunt Kate. Sent to bed, I would stretch out between the cotton blankets, my chapped ankles crossed lightly like Aunt Lucy's, and give a ballooning flip to my heavy flannel nightgown. Perhaps if I observed her closely enough, if I practised her every gesture, I could yet be Rowena to some Ivanhoe or, with luck, excite a passion in a Heathcliff breast out on a moor.

THEN it was Christmas morning. Some time after I had gone to bed, the parlour had been aired of smoke and whisky and apricot cordial. Crumbs of fruitcake and tobacco had been swept from the rug, and nothing was left of the night before but a trace of sweet-william.

By unspoken consent we faced up to Aunt Kate's box first as we would to warmed-up turnip before the apple-tart. A typical carton contained yellowish long underwear with slits in the crotch, not the best nor yet the cheapest,

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but good enough for good enough relatives. Neatly rolled into balls would be washed unravelled yarn from old sweaters. ('Three pairs of mittens here,' an accompanying note would say.) Invariably, nesting in wrinkled, greyish tissue, were several lengths of crocheting removed from old camisoles or corset-covers. ('As good as new. Keep in blue tissue against yellowing.') Then, for me, were three lemons, a great treat forty years ago, to be cut and rubbed against my sallow skin. ('Can last through February if kept in a cool place.') There were always sections of dark-blue broadcloth from one of her old suits, meticulously steamed and pressed, with every stitch mark obliterated. And at the very bottom of the carton was a spool-box and in it, for my father, a few explosively-dry cigars, left over from some hardware banquet, no doubt.

Mother would comment on the weight and warmth of the underwear and on how we'd appreciate it during the bitter months ahead. Aunt Kate was so thoughtful—well, so practical. She understood the needs of a growing family. Then she would hold up the balls of used yarn, scrupulously trying to teach us a regard for gifts plain as well as fancy, and chirp about what sturdy mittens she could make of them. Dutifully if faintheartedly we responded.

All the presents—the cheap water-colours, the *New Piano Guide*, the copy of *The Light That Failed*, the navel-orange as big as to-day's grapefruit, the tatting-edged handkerchief—were tiresome preludes to Aunt Lucy's gifts.

Hers were always wonderful, even when you had no use for them. The blue-velvet jewellery box, for instance. The Christmas I received it I had in my collection of semi-precious stones a razor-clam shell; a couple of aggies won from my brother in a game of marbles; two flat black stones with pink veins, picked up on a Cape Cod beach; a feather from a Canada goose; and a ring without a stone, a high-pronged setting dredged out of a pond one day when I was fishing for suckers.

But the present I will never forget—and its impracticality left my mother speechless—was a scarlet parasol with a scarlet fringe. I had never seen such a brilliant colour nor anything so artfully made. When unfurled, a butterfly

of yellow silk spread its spotted wings and rested, poised and tense, on the top. I opened it that Christmas morning and held it over my shoulder, twirling the handle experimentally as I'd seen Aunt Lucy do with her sunshades. As I did so, my mother cried out, leaning toward me: 'But it gives you such a pink look, such lovely colour!' And for no reason she put an arm around me and her eyes filled with tears. 'Oh, poor Lucy, poor darling. She'll never have any sense.'

From Aunt Lucy I received a music-box from Switzerland, a snowstorm inside a glass paperweight, a miniature Hepplewhite talboy for my doll's clothes. I had shown an alarming indifference to dolls, and even more to carriages. The first carriage I owned was ruined in service as a carrier of mud and stones in the construction of a beaver dam my brother was engaged in building. When on my tenth Christmas Aunt Lucy gave me a pink-lined doll-carriage with a mother-of-pearl push-bar, I gave up being a hod-carrier for ever and swung over to being a girl.

ONLY years later did I realise what a war waged between my aunts, if not for my soul, certainly for my sex. Mother, torn between Aunt Kate's imposing practicality and Aunt Lucy's unreckoning generosity, was an ineffectual umpire. And surely with so much to be said for strong character in a girl, and so little to be admired in improvidence and a giddy love of beautiful things, it was small wonder that she later tried to advance the cause of the Kates.

But by then it was too late. Far too late. Long before the biological age of reason, long before books can effectively shape the mind, the senses have been captured.

I've known since childhood Decembers that there are but two kinds of people—the poor-hearted and the rich-hearted. Perhaps the latter never fully cross the bridge from childhood. Jingling their silver-belled packages and letting the snow fall on lash and cheek, they are stopped midway by some unmediated knowledge that in the long span of time there are few Christmases, and those allotted them come but once a year.

January First Story: The first instalment of *Unlimited Liability*, an Irish story in three parts by Maurice Walsh.

That Old-Fashioned Christmas

J. M. MICHAELSON

'AN old-fashioned Christmas' is an expression we often hear, generally implying something desirable. Fashions in Christmas celebrations change, like fashions in other things. Basically, perhaps, Christmas 1955 will be celebrated in much the same way as Christmas 1855, but in many ways the contrasts will be more striking than the similarities.

A characteristic of Christmas now is the snowstorm of cards which falls through the letter-box of every house anything up to three weeks before Christmas Day. Every family in the country averages something like thirty cards. A century ago, the Christmas-card as a commercial product was only nine years old, and the great majority of people did not receive a single one. Queen Victoria took up the Christmas-card custom early, but it is said that eighteen were sufficient for her first effort.

The early cards had the same greeting as millions of cards will carry in 1955—'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.' But fifteen years were to pass before the development of colour-printing and the introduction of halfpenny-post combined to make the sending of cards an essential of celebrating Christmas.

A century ago the comparatively few cards posted were timed to arrive on Christmas Day. Not for another twenty-five years was the now familiar slogan 'Post Early for Christmas' to appear—and, in fact, people would have considered it absurd, and not in the spirit of Christmas, to send their cards and presents days and even weeks before Christmas Day.

CHRISTMAS a hundred years ago was not the prolonged feast which it is to-day. For the great majority of people it was a brief interruption of the normal round which began after working-hours on Christmas Eve and

ended on the morning after Christmas Day.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the daily newspapers. They were published as usual on Christmas Day and made virtually no concession to the spirit of festivity and goodwill. *The Times* for 25th December 1855, for instance, did not use the word 'Christmas' anywhere, except to record in a quarter of a column a list of the Christmas parties of some of the aristocracy. Father sitting down to Christmas breakfast could, unless relaxed by the spirit of the season, bury himself behind twelve closely-printed pages, none of which seemed to be influenced by what we now call 'the Christmas spirit'. The editor would probably have considered it a levity, if not an impertinence, to wish his readers a merry Christmas on December 25th!

The Crimean War, which had thrown a shadow over the Christmas celebrations of the previous year, was dragging to a close in peace moves. It is a remarkable example of how the general attitude towards Christmas has changed that leader-writers were able to discuss these moves on 25th December to the extent of several columns, without once referring to the 'season of peace and goodwill'!

The news columns recorded that the normal routine of business had continued as usual on Christmas Eve. The Courts sat as usual. There were not, as there had been in the newspapers of the previous Christmas Day, long lists of casualties from the Crimea, but desultory fighting was reported, and the War Office found nothing incongruous in gazetting the appointments of officers on Christmas Day.

There were, of course, none of the cross-words and quizzes which are now considered essential in newspapers around Christmas. Indeed, if father felt that the prospect of Christmas dinner called for lighter reading than ponderous leading articles, reports of cholera epidemics, and so on, the lightest

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reading he would have found would have been a three-column review of a book on *Russia and the Circassians*.

The advertisement columns around Christmas paid very little more attention to the festival. Present-giving had not yet become an orgy. The large displayed advertisement was still a thing of the future, and not one in fifty of the numerous small advertisements was concerned with Christmas gifts. From the few advertisements that did mention Christmas, one would guess that dressing-cases must have been almost the universal present for a lady when one 'couldn't think what to give'!

A fascinating alternative showing that the problem of smog is not new would have been the 'Aethereon respirator', which graduated the inhalation of fog, cold and damp air, but, miraculously, left the wearer perfectly free to converse without removing it! The makers stated that wearers avoided many severe colds, and for 12s. 6d. offered one of a type that could be worn in a scarf, so that it could not be seen. The ordinary silver-plated version was 5s.

THERE was, of course, no cinema, radio, or television to bring Christmas entertainment to the home. In many homes, no doubt, magic-lanterns purchased for from 4s. 6d. to three guineas provided the young with a thrill. Carol-singing was taken seriously, and was not, as it has tended to become in the 20th century, a form of licensed begging. The young singers knew the words and music of the carols they sang, carried picturesquely-decorated poles, and expected the occupiers of the houses they visited to come to the door or window to listen to them.

But Christmas Day entertainment was essentially home-made, with every member of the family party contributing according to his or her talents. The idea of getting entertainment by watching professional actors at their party would have seemed fantastic. A visit to a place of entertainment as a Christmas treat was usual for city-dwellers. The sophisticated pantomime was not yet established, but children in London could be taken to see Mr Hugo Vamp, the quick-change artist with a repertoire of 330 characters, or *Puss in Boots* and *Dick Whittington* illustrated by dioramic views, with the story narrated by Mr Leicester Buckingham. At the Royal Polytechnic there was a show of 'laughable phantasmagoria',

and Madame Tussaud and Sons were showing their celebrated waxworks, in those days mostly kings, princes, and sultans. Drury Lane offered a long programme, beginning at 6.30 p.m., with cheap admission after 9 p.m., including *Little Toddlekins*, a *Farce* and *Hey Diddle Diddle*. But theatres generally had not begun to offer 'Christmas attractions'. The plays were *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Lady of Lyons*, and there was nothing equivalent to the modern Christmas repertoire of *Peter Pan*, *Toad of Toad Hall*, *Treasure Island*, and so on. The 2 p.m. performance at Covent Garden was advertised as a 'morning performance'. The 'matinee' had, apparently, yet to come.

THE royal Christmas was beginning to set new fashions. From Germany, Prince Albert had brought the tradition of the ever-green tree, decorated and hung with presents. Four or five of these trees were set up in the Green Drawing Room at Windsor, each with scores of lights and presents. The royal Christmas was generally spent at Windsor—Sandringham was not to become a royal home for another five years. From the royal household the 'German Christmas-tree' custom spread to the general public, and in 1855 a gigantic one was on show at the Crystal Palace. But the manufacture of decorations for Christmas-trees in millions was still in the future.

Food probably played a bigger part in Christmas celebrations a century ago than it does to-day. Those were the days of gargantuan eight and ten course meals for the rich, and on many Christmas tables the turkey, goose, or other poultry was merely one course amongst many. For those of modest means a big joint of beef was the highlight of the Christmas dinner-table, the Queen showing the way with a baron of beef weighing hundreds of pounds and requiring a dish as large as a table. The royal dinner-table was sometimes loaded with stranger Christmas fare—several Cochin China pullets and the hump of a Brahmin ox, presented to the Queen and 'cured after the approved fashion'.

In many parts of the country there were generous gifts of beef and coals for the poor. Giving to the needy was a recognised part of the Christmas celebrations of the well-to-do, especially in country districts. The Queen made her gifts to the poor at Windsor personally on New Year's Day.

STORYBOOK STABLE

The Christmas of Dickens, with its stage-coaches, snow, jovial landlords, and so on, was, even a century ago, becoming a thing of memory. The railways were rapidly ousting the coaches and ruining the roadside inns. They were sometimes fast—trains could travel from Paddington to Slough for Windsor faster than they do to-day! But the urge to go away for Christmas had not yet come. The idea of eating Christmas-dinner in public at a restaurant or hotel, increasingly popular during the present century, would have seemed vulgar and even grotesque. It was not until the then adolescent Prince of Wales had grown

up and set the fashion that dining-out in restaurants became possible.

In general, Christmas a century ago was much simpler, and cheaper! It was not yet a nightmare for shop-assistants. Only the butchers and poulterers really went in for Christmas trade in a big way and they took immense pride in displaying prize carcases and mountains of birds of every kind, arranged decoratively over their entire shop-fronts, even up to the second and third storeys. There was no social compulsion to give presents to every acquaintance, no need to start the new year in debt to ensure a merry Christmas!

Storybook Stable

H. P. BLUNT

THE great horse cleared a practice fence and pounded up the stretch in a scatter of flying turf.

'Yon's Sir John Masefield's Right Royal,' said my guide. 'A grand lepper. Would win the National yet but the owner's lost interest. Seafarin' chap, they tell me.'

'I suppose you get a lot of 'chasers through your hands?' I said.

'Well, a tidy few, as you might say, for a stable that don't specialise. There's Miss Ouida's Forest King that won the Grand Military, and Vindictive, one o' Mr Kingsley's, that done for his jockey, and a cross-grained yellow circus horse o' Mr Frankau's as could win nigh anythin' if he were put to it. Mustard Pot we call him. But there's a bunch o' those highwaymen's horses as would train up to beat all.'

'Highwaymen's horses?'

The old stableman's leathery features assumed a lofty incredulity. 'Have you never heerd tell how Mr Boldrewood's Rainbow won the Melbourne Cup, under the name o' Darkie; jumped like a bird, too? Then we've

Black Bess that cleared the toll-gates. And a mare o' Mr Blackmore's, Winnie; a nuisance she is, dainty feeder.'

He began to mutter something about 'star shavings', so I interposed a question about a seemingly endless procession of sheeted thoroughbreds which was filing out of the yard gate, bound for the downs.

'Mr Nat Gould's they are. Classics. Won nigh every known race in spite o' dirty work.'

'Are you much bothered with that sort of thing nowadays?' I asked.

'Since Mr Wallace started trainin' with us we don't see a bit o' fun, as you might say, not in a twelvemonth. Kind o' scary o' Mr Wallace the sharps are. Grey Timothy yonder is his, and Gallopin' Gold; comes from some island he does, out furrin ways.'

We were now passing along a line of tiled loose-boxes which bordered three sides of a paved yard.

'Look out, sir!' A vicious head darted from a darkened doorway and teeth clashed a scant six inches from my shoulder.

'That's The Deuce, a man-killer. Bought

him off some play-actors, the boss did. And that Shackles o' Mr Kipling's, next door, ain't nowise better. Lost his self-respect, seemingly, since the Broken Link Handicap.'

I was next introduced to a long line of eager faces. 'Huntin' hosses, Mr Jorrocks's string. Hounds met over yonder a week come Monday and there ain't bin no holdin' 'em since.'

A small isolated building now claimed our attention. 'Hospital. Mr Browning's Roland's bin laid up here ever since he strained himself for they Belgians. That bag o' bones yonder belongs to a Spanish gent, Senor Cervantes. Rosinante he called her. Not up to much to my way o' thinkin'. Poor old Pegasus ain't never bin the same since he threw Bellerophon. Nerve gone, I'd say. And as for that old grey mare o' Tom Pearce's

—well, the S.P.C.A. would never have stood for it.'

Under the apple-trees of the home paddock a group of pensioners munched contentedly. A tall big-boned charger was indicated as 'Mr Kipling's Swallow' and a glossy hackney mare as 'Black Beauty—the children fair worship her.' An inquisitive little grey muzzle was investigating my pockets. 'Don't happen to have a bit o' bread and a pinch o' salt on you, sir?' asked the old man. 'That's Mr Kipling's Maltese Cat, well-nigh human he is. But for real character give me Mr Arnold's old Ruksh yonder. Well, sir, I think that's about the lot, but I wish you could have seen a little mare we had belongin' to his late Majesty—'

As I stole softly out of the library, I realised he had been speaking of King Arthur.

The Star



*Eternal, and frail
As a dew-star
Suspended,
Webbed in the winds,
Christmas its mystery burns
With celestial fire.*
*Though the gale roars the years through the trees
And storm kills the light,
When cold hugs the senses to sleep ——————
And fog cheats the sight,
Dark though the day, white though the night,
There is quiet in the roar,
In the calm is a Star.
Of the Star is the singing
Like a silver bell.
Joy, Star of Peace,
As the dew-fire
Suspended,
Webbed in the winds.*

EGAN MACKINLAY.



Habitat Study

HUGH CORLEY

AS Dr Gnash trudged up the hill through the snow for the fiftieth time his mind was planning the article he would write. First the title: 'Observations on the Influence of Habitat on the Survival of *Erithacus rubecula melophilus* in Cold Weather.' It was cumbersome. A lesser man might have used a lesser title, such as: 'Survival of Robins in Cold Spells.' But in Dr Gnash's opinion that was a sloppy, unscientific way to put it. He objected to the nickname Robin. Redbreast, if you must have an English name for the bird. But not Robin. Robin was a sentimental name used by bird-lovers as opposed to ornithologists. However, the title could wait. At present he was busy with the substance of his article.

'Ere's number seven, sir.' Dr Gnash jumped as his young assistant spoke behind him.

'Quite so, Dick. I was, I fear, abstracted and was forgetting our task. Is number seven present and correct?'

'He's O.K., sir.' The lad pointed to a bramble-bush where a robin was sitting, feathers fluffed out into a red and grey ball, a bright-eyed picture of unhappiness, a child of nature suffering from nature's harshness.

'Yes,' said the doctor, 'he doesn't look happy. But he's certainly not dead.' He

pulled his notebook out of his pocket and made the necessary note beside number seven, his fingers clumsy in their thick gloves.

Young Dick had his hands in his pockets. He always had. It was a slovenly habit. But then the boy never wore gloves, and the frost was bitter. Probably he was fumbling with a catapult or a tame mouse. No knowing what a boy like that would have in his pocket. But the lad had sharp eyes and had certainly been useful in this little piece of research. And the doctor believed he was genuinely interested in birds. 'Come then, Dick,' he said. 'Let us press on up the hill.'

As the doctor turned away up the track stamped out by their feet so many times before, he took one last look at the robin. It had scarcely moved. It crouched on the bramble-spray, partly sheltered by the bush from the biting wind, and watched them intently. Probably, thought the doctor, our daily visit is the only event in his life now. It breaks the tedium of slow starvation. Certainly it was remarkable how each bird as they came to it seemed to be waiting for them.

No, it was not remarkable. *Erithacus rubecula* was noted for its friendliness towards men, and it was to be expected that each individual of the species would be on the lookout for their arrival. What was indeed remark-

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able was the way they seemed to be surviving in this weather. It was completely at variance with the results of Professor Frischgarten, who had reported a high mortality-rate among members of the species in a similar spell of cold weather the previous winter.

On the shoulder of the hill number eight was waiting for them, a forlorn bit of fluff huddled in the snow in the partial shelter of the dry-stone wall. A detour revealed number nine fruitlessly searching for food in the snow among the dead bracken-stems. Dick trudged behind the distinguished doctor with the true countryman's patient indifference to the weather.

At the top of the hill the east wind bounded at them with a howl like a savage wolf. It momentarily swayed the doctor back in his tracks. He tried to pull his coat-collar up round his ears, extracted his notebook again and recorded the amazing survival of number ten on this bleak, snow-covered site.

For thirty days without a break the ground had been mantled in white, and for ten days before that it had been frozen hard. What did these birds live on? Blackbirds had been dying lately, their bodies shrunken almost to skeletons under their feathers. But these pert unhappy robins still clung to life.

On the plateau number eleven was waiting for them in the gnarled thorn-tree which was its lookout-post. The wind ruffled its feathers, and if it could have wept, surely it would have done so. Or did it, like young Dick, take everything as a matter of course?

'Still alive, Dick, but not looking very happy.'

'No, sir. 'Tis main bad weather for birds.'

'What about you, Dick? Are you as cold as I am?'

Dick mumbled something with a sheepish grin, and they fought their way across the plateau against the knives of wind.

THE snow was a galaxy of sparkling stars in the pale sunshine, coldly blue in the shadows. Dead grasses shivered and rustled dryly, and the wind hissed and whistled its venomous way across the bare snow, through the twigs of the bushes and the chinks in the wall. But no casualties were to be recorded among the robins whose territories were so carefully marked on the six-inch map in the doctor's pocket. 'You know, Dick, when we began this work I expected, if we got bad

weather, that these redbreasts on the hill would die very soon, and that the ones in the valley would survive, owing to their more sheltered situation.'

'Oh, ah,' said Dick. It was half query, half comment.

'In fact, the contrary has proved to be the case. The only specimens which we have had to record as missing are the two at the lowest extremity of the valley.'

'Tis them cats as 'ad 'em, sir,' said Dick.

'So you say, Dick.' The doctor fumbled for his handkerchief and wiped away the dewdrop from his nose ere the wind should turn it to an icicle. 'So you say. But we have no proof. It is just possible that there is something in this seemingly unfavourable habitat which predisposes to a greater acquisition of adiposity in good weather. That might enable the redbreasts on the hilltop to survive when their more sheltered brethren in the valley succumb.' He made a mental note to investigate the birds' feeding-habits in mild weather.

Dick had no idea what adiposity was, so he just said again: 'The cats got 'em. That ginger from the Dog and Dustbin, 'e be a proper devil after birds.'

At last they were in the shelter of the wood. In the comparative stillness the rasping crunch of the snow under their feet sounded suddenly loud. Overhead, the branches of the tall ash-saplings crashed and rattled together in the wilder gusts.

Robins thirty-nine, forty, and forty-one were duly recorded as present as the two bird-watchers slipped and stumbled along the uneven slope of the valley.

'I don't see forty-two, Dick,' said the doctor, peering about among the stark trunks of the trees.

'E's down by the brook, sir, over t'other side, looking for grub by the water's edge.'

'Ah, yes. You have sharp eyes, Dick. I suppose that *is* forty-two. You don't think it's one of his neighbours from over the stream, come trespassing?'

'No, sir. 'Tis forty-two. 'E's got a feather of 'is tail broke. I knows un.'

'I expect you're right,' said Dr Gnash as he tried with numbed fingers to turn the page of his notebook.

They followed the stream down the valley. Bramble-stems dipped and rose jerkily in and out with the movement of the water, icicles

HABITAT STUDY

slowly growing on their frost-blackened leaves.

'I don't see forty-three, Dick.'

'Cat's 'ad un,' was the laconic reply, and Dick pointed to a scuffle of pug-marks in the snow and a pathetic patch of downy feathers one or two of which were tipped with tawny red.

'Yes, yes, indeed it looks as if you are right there.' The doctor made the appropriate obituary notice in his book.

'That's the lot then, sir. Forty-four and forty-five be gone some days now.'

'Yes, Dick. That's the lot. Thank you, once again, for your help. See you to-morrow.'

'It'll thaw to-morrow,' said Dick.

'Indeed? It shows no sign of it yet.'

'Mr Tuft's geese was flying yesterday and again to-day. It'll rain.'

'Well, if you are right, perhaps you would accompany me once more for a final check-up?'

'Yes, sir, O.K. I'll wait here now, sir.' He pulled from his pocket a catapult. 'I may see that ginger cat.'

'Good-night then, Dick. I shall mention your help in my article.' A true bird-lover, thought the doctor, but, alas, I doubt if he will ever make a real ornithologist.

AS the doctor walked back down the village street he noticed that the weathercock on the church was far from certain of the wind's direction. Mostly it said east. But every now and then it veered and declared that the wind was south-east, and once due south. Could it be that Dick was right? Could geese foretell these changes even when they eluded the Air Ministry's meteorologists? Perhaps sometime he could investigate scientifically the meteorolo-

logical prognostications of the Anatidae.

In any case, it had been a long spell of almost unbroken frost. The average temperature had been two degrees higher than that recorded during Frischgarten's observations, but the cold spell had already gone on three days longer than his had done. All things considered, the survival of the robins was remarkable.

Dick waited till the doctor was out of sight among the trees. The sun was already sinking red behind a bank of clouds. Rain-clouds, Dick thought with satisfaction. He gave a low whistle. Number forty-two announced his arrival in a bush behind him with a tiny fluttering of wings. 'Ere y're, mate,' said Dick, pulling out his pocket-knife and opening it with a thumbnail like a lump of flint. 'You won't want my 'elp to-morrow.'

He walked to a fallen elm-tree and ripped off some bark. Its black inner surface was scarred in patterns with the tracks of bark-beetle grubs. And there, with grey legs upturned, lay a dozen or so woodlice, chilled to immobility among the frozen dust of their own excreta. 'There,' Dick said, 'that'll last you through the night, I reckon.'

He stood back and watched the bird hop on to the log. Starving as it was, it looked all round before cautiously snapping up a couple of woodlice. Dick watched its elegant movements as it flirted its tail, bowed, hopped away, and returned. The bright eyes never left Dick's face, but the robin ate all the woodlice.

'That better?' Dick asked. 'Thought I'd forgotten yer, I suppose. But I finished my pocketful of bread on number forty-one. So long. Mind that cat, and don't thee tell the doctor, mate.' And he stumped off down the valley, whistling tunelessly in the gathering dusk.

Foreign Winter

*It wasn't the same,
This summer December.
The sun was too hard
For the heart to remember,
And hadn't the touch
Of a Cumberland June—
Those fly-away kisses
That vanish so soon.*

*The gardens were golden,
But yearning to yield
To the breeze of a Cumberland
Buttercup field;
And the sky was so blue
That I cried aloud
For the gossamer grey
Of a Cumberland cloud.*

HAZEL TOWNSON.

New Care of the Old

Grouped Dwellings for the Aged

LESLIE B. THOMAS

IN Britain to-day there are 5½ million people over the age of 65, the qualifying age for Old Age Pensions. A century ago there were only a million. The percentage is steadily increasing, and it is officially estimated that within another twenty-five years this 11 per cent of the population represented by to-day's figure will have increased to 16 per cent and that for every old person there will be only four of working-age.

This is the start of the problem which is gradually taking the serious attention of everyone concerned with the housing and care of the aged. In the last year or two it has caused them, the county and county borough welfare authorities, the voluntary organisations, and, to a lesser degree, the hospital authorities, to study with great care the possible means of providing for the well-being of those who are growing old. The chief aim in this more enlightened period is to help the ageing to look after themselves and to live their own accustomed lives as long as they can—for in this lies the secret of longevity.

In years gone by ageing parents were cared for by their families or by maiden daughters. Nowadays the same willingness is there, but families are smaller, work makes them more mobile, and they often leave the area where their parents are. Houses, too, are smaller, lacking the necessary spare room, and not only daughters but also daughters-in-law go out to work. The result is that increasing numbers of able-bodied and near-able-bodied pensioners seek accommodation at the hands of the authorities. Too often this means a bed in a County Council Home, or even in a hospital when the state of health has run too low.

The welfare authorities tell us that for every old person who comes to them there must be

many who hold back in fear of 'the institution'. These go on struggling alone, becoming more and more lonely and lacking the care and companionship they need.

Here is the crux of present-day welfare doctrine. It was Dr Trevor Howell who propounded the basic theory that lonely old people quickly become frail lonely old people, and then frail and sick, the step before the end. It is firstly loneliness that must be combated, and then aimlessness.

Frank Fawcett, Shropshire's Welfare Officer, recently startled a local meeting of a voluntary society by stating categorically that no man or woman should be compelled to retire at 60 or 65. They should, on the contrary, be encouraged to go on working. As they get less inclined or able to do a full day's work, then they should be given jobs they can do, and be allowed to do them as long and as slowly as they like.

Applying this to the home, where the real problem lies, old folk should be encouraged to look after themselves as long and as far as they are able. In this way the interest in life continues and life is prolonged as long as the interest is there.

IN Shropshire two recent schemes for the old are evening visitors and night helps. The former go in each evening to certain old folk living on their own, see that the coal is brought in, a decent fire going, a hot supper or supper drink prepared, and then they help the old person to bed. Night helps are for those needing what amounts to home nursing during the night. They relieve relatives or neighbours who care for the old people in the daytime when they are ill.

Another scheme Frank Fawcett favours is

NEW CARE OF THE OLD

the equivalent of the day nursery for children. Old people living with relatives often have to go into a home because work prevents the family from looking after them in the daytime. Where man and wife are both away all day, a sort of day nursery for the elderly parent who is fit would give him or her companionship and a meal at midday and leave the warmth of the home atmosphere with the daily evening reunion to look forward to at around teatime. There should also be a scheme whereby the man and wife who look after an elderly parent could go away for their annual holiday and have a holiday from looking after the parent too, with a resumption of the normal home life at the end. This could be done by a system of enabling old folk to enter a home for just that fortnight, and maybe it might even be developed so that authorities with homes at or near the coast could exchange temporarily some residents with others inland.

THE ideal place, however, for old folk is in their own homes, among their own cherished possessions, doing their own chores, and under the roof where they ultimately would choose to die. In a well-written brochure circulated by his committee among other local authorities in Shropshire Frank Fawcett puts a strong case for this, and says plainly: 'All welfare services for old people should be directed towards this end.' Suitable housing is essential, he remarks, and then goes on to outline an excellent scheme for 'grouped dwellings' — individual bungalows grouped around a warden's house, where the resident warden and his wife play Dutch uncle and aunt to the residents, who can summon them by pushing a bell if they feel ill or should any other emergency arise.

The beauty of this system is that the old folk not only have their own household gods around them and live their own lives but that they are also away from anything remotely savouring of charity or of oldtime 'institutions' or 'the Union'.

The local council, as the housing authority, builds the groups of bungalows and charges the residents a reasonable rent, and the county authority makes a grant towards the deficit out of its welfare funds. This works out infinitely cheaper to the ratepayer, by the way, than building, staffing, and running an Old People's Home, apart from being a better psychological venture.

Sturminster Rural Council in Dorset have

entered such a scheme with their county council and have three estates of grouped dwellings. The dwellings, about sixteen to the estate, are grouped round a secluded lawn, are all ground-floor buildings with, in the main, only one bedroom each. Where brother and sister live together, there are two, whereas in some there is only a bed-sitting room. Every dwelling has kitchen, larder, bathroom and toilet, and incorporates special features found to make life easier and safer for old people. Spare bedrooms are unnecessary, as visitors' rooms with bathroom and toilet are provided for the use of friends or relatives visiting tenants for short spells.

Each group has a room for common use of tenants. Central boilers provide a communal hot-water supply throughout the year and heat a radiator in each bedroom in winter. In some cases the central boiler also heats a communal drying-room for the old ladies to hang out their smalls. The men are catered for by the provision of a small plot of ground where they can garden and grow their own vegetables.

The warden and his wife have free quarters with heat and light. An electric-bell connects each dwelling to theirs and they have a phone. The man's job, which permits his having a normal full-time job away from the settlement, is to maintain the hot-water system and to empty the old folks' dustbins. His wife is responsible for looking after the communal parts of the place and is available, especially in emergency, to give some care and assistance, including the occasional provision of meals to the old people, over whom she exercises sympathetic supervision. The provision of meals includes catering for the occasional visitor to relieve the old person hostess, and the serving of meals in bed during illness when the old person needs this help. The warden's wife would, indeed, do for her charges what a younger relative living near would do. Undue calls on her time by one tenant at the expense of others is circumvented by a council charge of 1s. 9d. an hour for services rendered at a tenant's own request.

The bungalows are furnished by the tenants, and each becomes his or her home. The knowledge that the warden and his wife are available as sympathetic friends if an emergency arises is a big boon to the tenants.

Briefly, rents average 15s. 8d. a week, inclusive. The total cost per dwelling averages £2, 4s. 3d. a week. Dorset County Council,

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whose contribution is based only upon those items normally figuring in their welfare expenditure, pays a maximum of £485 a year in respect of a sixteen-dwellings group. The rest is properly chargeable to the local council's housing fund, and individual tenants in need can and do obtain help from the National Assistance Board to pay their rents.

HOW do the old folk react to the scheme? Let us take a few extracts from the Sturminster Council's booklet published a couple of years ago after the experiment had been running five years in the case of one block of twelve dwellings, three years in the case of a second of fifteen dwellings, and two years in the case of a third, also of fifteen dwellings. Over the years seventy-three tenants, ranging in age from 60 to 92, have occupied these dwellings.

To date of publication, there had been five deaths. In three cases illness was less than twenty-four hours, and in the other two it lasted just over a week. One tenant was removed to hospital and then to a home, and one tenant moved in from a home.

The Council says that the turnover of tenants was not as great as was expected, which they maintain suggests that the grouped dwellings encourage longevity. In certain cases individual tenants would long since have been dead if they had continued to live in their unsuitable houses, or, at best, they would have become chronic hospital or institutional cases. As it was, they were still able to lead independent, active lives.

Not only was there no increase in disability among existing tenants, but some degree of improvement had even been noticeable in certain cases. One tenant progressed, the booklet says, on removal from a bedridden state in an old cottage so as to be able to do her own housework and shopping in the new grouped dwelling. Another old lady, given a tenancy at the age of 87, had by the date of publication reached 92 and was still capable of looking after herself despite an arthritic hip.

The booklet lists some of the special advantages to the old folk as follows. Absence of stairs eliminates considerable heart-strain.

Even winter temperatures bring comfort to the ageing body. The bell, to be pressed for help in emergency, relieves a very real mental anxiety. Unlike life in a home, tenants prepare their own meals and have their chores to occupy a proportion of the day, thus reducing the boredom which too often accompanies old age, and is life's greatest enemy in the later stages. Tenants live among their own possessions, not standard furniture as provided in homes—another morale-builder.

Frank Fawcett, whose committee has put up the scheme to eleven of the twenty-five Shropshire district councils responsible as housing authorities, adds in his own well-prepared brochure that there is also considerable administrative advantage on the other side of the horse. Certain social services—home helps, provided by the county council for domestic duties on payment, meals on wheels, whereby the W.V.S. take round hot meals so many times a week to old folk living in their own homes, and many others—can be provided with minimum difficulty and expense. These services of themselves make it more possible for old folk to live in their own homes instead of having to go into homes as a result of the start of the rusting process.

AN indirect benefit of the scheme for grouped dwellings is that it can be put into operation to reorientate the old almshouses provided for the poor of past generations. These too often are closed or struggling because the original capital funds no longer produce incomes commensurate with current money values. Co-operation between the charities concerned and their local councils could bring these dwellings, eminently suitable fundamentally, under the grouped dwellings scheme with the councils running them.

Shropshire councils are now considering this co-operation with the county authority, and Warwickshire are also taking first steps in the same direction. The County Councils Association has given the scheme its blessing and sent a memorandum of evidence to the Government departmental committee concerned with the problems of old age.

We shall all be elderly some day. What are we doing to prepare for the inevitable hour?

The Man Who Struck Queen Victoria

EVA HOPE WALLACE

ON 1st May 1850 Queen Victoria gave birth to her third son at Buckingham Palace. The Queen made a good recovery, and on 27th May went in an open barouche for her first drive since her confinement to Cambridge House, Piccadilly, to inquire after her uncle the Duke of Cumberland, who was dangerously ill.

As the carriage was about to leave Cambridge House a young man stepped forward and struck the Queen across the face with a small cane. The blow bruised Her Majesty's cheek and crushed her bonnet over her forehead. The ruffian was quickly seized by the angry crowd, who were ready to lynch him.

At Vine Street Police Station he gave his name as Lieutenant Robert Pate of 27 Duke Street, St James, but, as a matter of fact, he was living in rooms over Fortnum and Mason's shop. To the amazement of the quiet law-abiding people living there, police-officers invaded the premises and began a systematic search. The residents were astounded to hear that one of their number had been arrested for striking the Queen.

PATE was tried at the Old Bailey. The judge remarked:

'Such an unprovoked assault on a woman in the lowest walk of life would excite feelings of indignation; but in the case of a young and beloved Queen this natural feeling was greatly intensified. A poor, worthless, ill-disposed outcast might possibly be incited to commit an outrageous act with the view of gaining some object; but in the case of an officer of a distinguished regiment, possessed of ample means and with no ostensible object to gain, such an act could only be the result of some mad uncontrollable impulse.'

The jury, however, rejected a plea of insanity, and Pate was sentenced to seven years' transportation beyond the sea, the judge observing that it was only out of respect to the prisoner's family that the court refrained from ordering him to be publicly whipped.

Pate's motive in striking the Queen was never disclosed. It was suggested that he did it to disgrace his family, with whom he had quarrelled; or that he wanted to call attention to the fact that younger men had been promoted, while he was still a lieutenant; or that he had become mentally unbalanced because his favourite horse had been destroyed. This latter suggestion was generally accepted by an indignant public as the reason for his 'lenient sentence'.

The versifier Martin Tupper expressed the public indignation in verse:

*O dastard! Thus to strike that brow
Anointed and so fair;
O brave young Queen! That bruise is now
The brightest jewel there.*

PATE was remanded to Portland Prison to await transportation to Van Diemen's Land in the convict ship *William Jardine*. The ship left Tilbury Dock on 20th July 1850, with Staff-Surgeon John Campbell, M.D., R.N., in charge. In his diary for 7th August Campbell writes:

'Received 100 more prisoners on board from Portland Prison, including Robert Pate, a military officer, who has excited unusual indignation by striking Her Majesty with a stick. No instructions have been issued respecting Pate, but as he came on board in plain clothes, I did not deem it necessary to make any change in his dress. I found him

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perfectly tractable and gave him a berth in the hospital for the present. He seems reserved and peculiarly gentle and refined in his manners, so as to seem totally incapable of such a crime when in his right mind.'

Later on, in a letter to the Governor of Portland Prison, he says:

'Robert Pate was quiet and well-conducted. His manner was absent and peculiar, and he was not disposed to enter into conversation with anyone. I found great difficulty in persuading him to take air and exercise. He declined the use of books as reading made his head ache, and as he seemed in a low, desponding state he was allowed a berth in the hospital.'

There is a novel which tells the story of the voyage of the convict ship and her passengers. In this story Robert Pate dies in helping to quell a mutiny and saves Dr Campbell's life. 'His body wrapped in a Union Jack was committed to the deep.'

But the true and unromantic fact is that Robert Pate arrived at Hobart Town on 14th November in the *William Jardine*. He was the only convict not in prison dress, and when he was handed over to the Governor of Hobart Prison, Dr Campbell said: 'I hand him over to you as I received him from Portland Prison.'

Subsequently Pate was given ticket of leave and joined in the rush to the newly-discovered

Australian goldfields in 1854. He returned to England a rich man, but so badly crippled that he walked with two sticks.

AND now comes the strange arm of coincidence—stranger than fiction.

In 1880 Doctor John Campbell of the *William Jardine* was medical officer of Woking Invalid Prison. His second son, Sinclair Williamson Campbell, was a junior cashier in the London County Bank, Hammersmith, now the Westminster Bank.

One day a badly-crippled man came into the bank with his wife, and was pointed out to Campbell as the man who struck Queen Victoria thirty years ago.

'Why, my father knew him!' cried Campbell, and he rushed after the customer.

That night he wrote and asked his father if he might bring 'an old acquaintance' to Woking.

A fortnight later Dr Campbell shook hands with his former convict, and they exchanged memories without embarrassment of those far-off days. They had tea and much talk, and the family enjoyed Pate's stories of the great Australian gold-rush. Dr Campbell thought Pate still decidedly childish and unbalanced, but saw that his 'Gilpin-like' wife more than made up for his shortcomings.

The White Wood

*Snow spoke silence in the clearing
Where tree-arms somnolent waited
The winter sun's warm weeping—*

*Warm to wet only the topmost tip
Of weathered teasel, gaunt parsley,
Or the long hook of ash whip;*

*And on a bough five dead birds
Petrified, the snow and the oblique sun
Darkened there knowing no dumb words*

*To rekindle cold song, or make
The fawn stoat curled in the cleft
Of birch-bough once more wake.*

*Cruelty was there in winter's cold—
And death. Yet the wood was a white wonder
And the splashed sun a fleece of gold.*

MADGE HALES.



The Common Heart

KAMALA MARKANDAYA

IN my lifetime I have seen so much change that I like to believe I am inured to it. This is not so; I am constantly being surprised. Never so surprised, however, as the day Miss Hylton said that a certain village, in which she lived and I once worked, would that year celebrate Christmas.

'Oh no,' I said aghast, because I am a Hindu, and the village had been Hindu too; and because our friendship was on the footing that permits such displays of frankness.

'Oh yes,' she said, allowing, though she was English, a certain mild expression of triumph to flit across her face.

'I shall have to see this thing for myself,' I said.

'Do,' she replied.

SO on Christmas Eve we rattled down together in her decrepit station waggon—English missionaries are always poor as church mice—myself still disbelieving, because Hindus, curiously enough, like being Hindus—they don't desperately want to be Christians. And without Christians how could there be Christmas?

Yet, of course, there had been other unusual Christmases: when as a child I went

to my first party at the English club, and the floor had been inexplicably covered with cotton-wool, though in the wonder of my first Christmas-tree I had neglected to ask why; and that vicious Christmas Eve at college when a curfew was imposed, and we had swarmed out in passionate fury—though but for the curfew we would have been in bed—to defy authority, desecrating the quiet of that holy night.

And then independence, and Christmas still a public holiday, welcomed throughout Hindustan, which is India, as holidays always are, and in my home town a display of fireworks to rival that of Dewali, our Festival of Lights. So why not Christmas in a village?

But what would they do for a church?

'You will see,' said Miss Hylton, smiling secretively. And the secret was kept from me even by the villagers, who were, after all, my people, not hers; so that it was not until, nearing midnight, that I was taken to the hut, which, outside, was like any other, but which, inside, had been converted with some skill into the semblance of a chapel.

VILLAGE huts are lit by oil-lamps. This one was illuminated by hundreds of lighted

wicks floating in shallow saucers of oil, row upon row ranged against the walls, and the reflection of each bright pure flame lying like teardrops in the black glistening oil. In the centre, resting upon straw, was a crib; in it swaddling-clothes arranged to suggest a child in its folds, but quite empty—perhaps no one had been able to afford a doll; and bending over the crib the figure of a woman, draped so carefully you could not tell what material of earth or air—indeed what artist—had imparted to it that perfect and infinitely lovely pose of a mother with her child.

All round were the villagers, their hands held palm to palm, standing as they would in a temple, or before a shrine; and as midnight approached they began ringing small hand-bells and clashing tiny cymbals as they might in a temple.

I DON'T know why I should have been moved so. After all, I had seen the Nativity, like this, in many Christian churches and homes. But I was moved. Perhaps nothing before had been quite like this. I half-turned towards Miss Hylton, not to say anything, but in that sudden absolute understanding which sometimes spurts, so fleetingly, between two human beings.

Aware of my slight movement, she said softly, her face glowing: 'It must have been very—very like this,' and there was a silence, and she went on: 'You know, they must have listened to me—heard me, I mean, because

they always listened. They must have, mustn't they—they've even got Herod.'

I wish she had not said that, for when I turned to look at the figure—carved in wood this time, the face hideously painted in cruel reds and blacks—I saw it was not Herod but Kamsa. The small placard at its feet said so, quite clearly. And then, looking round, I saw other placards, equally explicit and, with an innate courtesy, equally unobtrusive, written in Indian characters which Miss Hylton could not read, because, as I have said, she was English and knew only English. Otherwise, she would have known that this gentle scene before us represented another birth—for we, too, have our Nativity, and in it the child that is born amid rejoicing is the god Krishna, and the village is called not Bethlehem, but Gokul, and there is King Kamsa, too, who ordered a murder of the innocents.

'It's not—' I began, and then as quickly stopped, becoming aware that everyone there, every one of these villagers, was watching me; and it was as if they were, all of them together, willing me to be silent, and I said no more.

Out of their feeling for this Englishwoman who lived like them, the poor, they had made this Christmas for her; and though their own religion was too close, its pull too strong, for them to renounce it for even an hour, or a night, still their—simplicity—or sophistry—had led them to this reconciliation. Or perhaps only love could have shown them the way. It was not for me to qualify it.

The Wonderful Stamp

*A postage-stamp's a passport
No country will dispute;
A pillar-box's an outlet
To every wishful route.*

*And at a foreign frontier,
With nothing to declare,
A postmark is a visa
To travel anywhere.*

*There's magic then in posting,
Alike Aladdin's lamp,
We call a postal genie
By rubbing on a stamp.*

JAMES MACALPINE.

Britain's Haunted Highways

LESLIE E. WELLS

CHRISTMAS-TIME is ghost-time. Each Yuletide we listen to stories about haunted castles, inns, and manor-houses. Now phantoms of a more modern kind are making themselves known. Britain's highways are scoured from end to end, both day and night, by motorists, lorry-drivers, and other road users who give more and more accounts of haunted roads.

One such stretch of road is situated at Matley, near Hyde, in Cheshire. This is a perfectly straight length of roadway, with nothing whatever to confuse drivers of vehicles. Yet the road achieved an unenviable notoriety because, in three years from 1928 to 1930, no less than sixteen accidents occurred on it.

That so many accidents, which involved cycles, cars, and lorries, and caused several deaths, should take place on a few hundred yards of excellent highway aroused the interest of the authorities. But the most careful investigations by the police and the officials responsible for the road's upkeep brought to light no natural explanation of the disasters.

Disturbing to all who used the road was the testimony of people involved in the accidents. They all told the same story. The vehicle in which they had been travelling had swerved to avoid a motor-lorry which they had seen backing out on to the road from an opening between an inn and a crossroad. All were unanimous in their testimony on that point, a fact which only served to bewilder the authorities, for there is *no* opening of any kind at the spot where the lorry was seen on each occasion.

It is not surprising that, during an inquest on one of the victims of an accident on the road, the coroner, looking puzzled and disturbed, said: 'If any juryman can throw light on the recurrence of these unexplained accidents on this perfectly straight road, I should be obliged.' Then he added, very

significantly: 'If you could go there, say at midnight, it might be interesting to both you and me.'

Yet the mystery was never explained, and the accidents ceased as unaccountably as they had begun.

THERE is more to explain the haunted stretch of road between Blandford and Salisbury. Motorists on this road have reported that, at a particular point, they have heard screams and groans. One motorist fainted with shock when a blood-covered hand crept round his shoulder and rested on the steering-wheel. Another declared that he saw the face of a dead man staring up at him from the road, although investigation proved there was no dead man in the vicinity.

These amazing and alarming happenings caused such a stir that the Bristol newspapers took up the matter. Their investigations brought to light the fact that a motor accident had taken place at the very point on the road where the apparition had been seen.

The White Lady of Litlington is very much of a reality. She has been seen many times on a lonely stretch of road near Abington Pigotts, a village two miles from Litlington, Cambridgeshire. She is described as having flaming eyes which pierce the darkness, and she turns her face suddenly towards a person, giving them such a fiery glance that they are petrified.

The White Lady wears the flowing skirts and large poke-bonnet of Victorian days, and while many people testify to having seen her, the most reliable witness is Mr H. Radclyffe Maunders, a lay reader of Litlington. He encountered her one night as he was cycling home. The reality of the presence was revealed by Mr Maunders later, when he said: 'I have never believed in ghosts, but I have ex-

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perienced something which I cannot explain.'

Equally well authenticated is the Black Lady of Wensleydale, in Yorkshire. She haunts the section of road which connects the two villages of Aysgarth and Woodhall, on opposite sides of the River Ure. The most baffling thing about her is the fact that, so far as is known, nothing has ever happened in the vicinity to account for the haunting.

She always appears in a black dress of the type fashionable in the last century, a coloured bonnet, and a pair of white gloves. Completing her outfit is a walking-stick. So real and natural is her appearance that many people have spoken to her, not realising that there was anything ethereal about her. On one occasion, in fact, a cyclist dismounted and asked her if she could direct him to the near-by village of Redmire. Fortunately, perhaps, she simply ignores anyone who speaks to her.

THAT vehicles haunt certain highways is well testified. London, where there is neither stillness nor silence to encourage the imagination, has its quota of such apparitions. The legend of the ghost bus of North Kensington has been repeated over the years, and people still testify to seeing it. On certain nights, after the regular bus service has stopped, people have been awakened by the noise of a bus racing down Cambridge Gardens. The vehicle, though usually brilliantly lit, has neither driver nor passengers. On reaching the junction of Cambridge Gardens and St Mark's Road, it vanishes.

A ghost car haunts the Watford by-pass near London. It looms convincingly as a normal car until it is picked up by headlights. Then, to the astonishment and awe of those who see it, it proves to be no more than a skeleton, as though it were the wreckage of a burnt-out vehicle. Those who have stopped when confronted by this apparition have seen it dissolve like a wraith in a mist.

More frightening and much more dangerous is the phantom lorry seen on the Great North Road near Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. Motorists have been terrified when approaching a rather sharp bend, for, coming round the corner towards them, and on the wrong side of the road, rushed a heavy lorry, its headlights glaring and the driver wrestling frantically with the steering-wheel. Drivers have swerved violently to avert what seemed to be an inevitable head-on collision.

Pulling up, they have thrust indignant heads into the open with the intention of speaking their minds freely to a driver who so flagrantly disregarded elementary rules of safety. But, to their amazement, they have found the road immediately behind them completely deserted. The offending vehicle might have vanished into thin air. Indeed, there are drivers who are convinced that that is exactly what happened. And the explanation of the appearance? The records show that, some years ago, a lorry-driver had a fatal crash on the very bend where the lorry keeps appearing. Thus it would seem that the driver is compelled to keep enacting the fatal experience.

FAR more intriguing than the appearance of any individual or vehicle in the highway apparition seen by motorists travelling late at night on the main road from Cambridge to Ely. They have found themselves following what they took to be a column of marching soldiers, assuming it to be a Highland unit, because their headlights picked out the dim swaying of kilts. But always the column has turned off the road into the mist of the flanking fens. It is in the moment that the column has wheeled that the motorists have seen the crests of Roman helmets and the silhouettes of large, square shields. No one has yet discovered what Caesarian cohort still trudges along this road, which is the one the Romans themselves first laid down.

A traditional highway ghost has often been seen on the stretch of Bath Road which links Hungerford and Marlborough. This phantom is a cavalier, riding a black charger and swathed from head to heel in a voluminous, billowing cloak. Those who have seen him say that he appears like a great black shadow from the hedge flanking the road. He spurs his horse squarely across the road and vanishes at full speed on the other side of the highway. Who he is and why he should haunt this particular point on the highway no one knows. Nevertheless, there are many road users who are quite sure that they have encountered him.

Another traditional ghost is a pale, long-haired woman who runs shrieking along the second-class roads on and near Aylmerton Heath, Norfolk. It is also in this county, along lonely roads at dusk, that young Lord Dacre may be seen riding his rocking-horse. He was murdered in 1565 by his guardian,

THE GEESE ARE GETTING FAT

Sir Richard Fulmerston, who wickedly arranged that the rocking-horse should collapse, resulting in the young earl breaking his neck. To-day, it is said, the boy can still be seen prancing around on the sawn-through rocking-horse.

THE ghosts of tradition are often scoffed at by those who are sceptical about such

things. But the modern apparition seems to be more terrifying than its predecessor—for ghost lorries which result in accidents cannot be ignored. That such exist there are many motorists in England emphatically to testify. There are juries, coroners, and authorities who admit that accidents happen for which there is no natural explanation. Who shall say that there are not ghosts on the roads of Britain which are very real indeed?

The Geese Are Getting Fat

PRESCOT STEPHENS

I HAVE forgotten the date, but I need no calendar to remind me that Christmas is coming. I just can't get in at my front door.

Yesterday evening, for example, I couldn't open it more than two inches, and bursts of unrestrained hilarity greeted the insertion of my nose through the resultant crevice. When I did at last get in through the back door, I found the hall made impassable by an outsize meat-safe which up till then had been quietly rotting, unused, forgotten and inoffensive, in the back-yard.

'I've scrubbed it all out for you,' says Eileen.

'For me?' I say. 'I don't want it.'

'Yes, you do. Don't you remember you promised to make a doll's house for Frances?'

My mind goes back to the summer when Christmas was far enough away and I was rash enough to indulge in such a promise. And I see Frances herself eyeing me with accusing expectancy as I survey the relic. I cannot escape.

I bend down and look inside it, mutter something about not time to do very much, and as I stand up I receive a sharp tap on the crown of my head from what feels like a heron's beak. But it is not a heron, it is the half-opened skeleton of my umbrella sus-

pended point downwards from the ceiling, bereft of its protecting material.

'Ah, that just shows. We'll have to hang it a bit higher,' says Eileen with that purposeful note in her voice which she adopts at this time of year. 'We thought it would make such a good hall decoration. We only have to wrap its ribs in coloured paper and tinsel and hang coloured balls from it. I think it's rather original'.

'It was my original and only one,' I protest.

'Yes, but it was so torn, dear, and you took so long to take it for mending that I thought you weren't going to use it any more.'

I PASS on apprehensively into the lounge. My water-colours and prints have been removed from the walls, which will soon be adorned with gaudy specimens of child art. The centre of the room has been cleared to accommodate a crate containing every type of paper decoration which my family have hoarded from past Christmases. This pernicious practice of hoarding does not, however, absolve me from having to buy a new set each year, and this Christmas our interior will be bedecked both with this year's and with the battered remnants of the last five years'.

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Paper-chains, bells, Christmas-trees, tinsel are strewn over the floor. In one corner a small table now liberally smeared with paint and glue serves as a base for the mass production of *objets d'art* out of cheese-boxes, cereal cartons, milk-bottle tops, and detergent packets. In another corner a roll of bedroom wallpaper, which I had been intending to use next spring, is being mutilated with a large pair of scissors. 'Philip is cutting it up into squares,' explains Eileen, 'so that you can use it in the doll's house.'

But all that I can tolerate. What I cannot tolerate is the way my family have this year emptied a small polished walnut cabinet of my most private and personal papers—my birth-certificate, my school certificate, my income-tax returns, my unpaid bills, my overdraft statements, and the copy of my last will and testament. These precious documents bearing on the financial position, and prospects, of the family, I shall probably find some days later stuffed in with the cookery-books in the kitchen-drawer or thrown into the sideboard with the jams and bottled fruit.

The cabinet itself has now acquired a gabled roof and two chimneys serving as a means of ingress for two disreputable-looking Santa Clauses. The front of the cabinet is decorated with windows and doors which, I am assured, are removable. When, by opening the cabinet door, I attempt to investigate what purpose all this serves, I am immediately set upon by the whole family, who seize my arms and my coat-tails and drag me clear. I am threatened with every kind of penalty if I dare to look inside my own cabinet before Christmas Day.

But I like to think that after Christmas I shall have my own back. Each Christmas becomes ever more expensive than the last, and on December 31st of each year my financial position is the shakiest ever. This year I shall call my family together and in solemn tones try to bring home to them the seriousness of the situation. 'We have had an orgy of spending,' I shall say. 'We must retrench.'

When Philip has finished explaining to Frances that Daddy means he can't afford to buy any more sweets for her, and when the resultant howl has subsided, I shall continue with all the gravity at my command: 'I have very serious doubts whether we shall be able to afford a summer holiday next year.'

But no—dash it—that won't do. Eileen will only say in her serenely mocking voice: 'But you said this last year, dear—and then insisted we should all drag after you to Brittany.'

And everyone will suddenly burst out laughing.

BUT I am never left long with my thoughts, for if there is one thing that a father learns, it is that he can never have any privacy. Even now as I sit scribbling in the corner of an empty room I can hear the rest of the family calling me. I know what it is they want.

And now here is Eileen bursting into the room. 'Philip wants to help you turn the meat-safe into a doll's house, dear,' she says. 'When are you going to start?'

How many days to Christmas?

To a Charming Bridge Opponent

*My dearest friend, thou now my direst foe,
Whose lovely hand swift victory would seize,
Whose mind is bent to bring me to my knees,
And win a fortune from my overthrow,
Take heed! The gods of chance oft love to tease;
Oft ripening grain a sudden storm lays low!
The well-fought fight is yours? It is? But no—
For, see, I give that lovely hand a squeeze!
No other circumstance would let me dare
Even your little-finger's tip to press;
But forced discards now leave your high spade bare
And jeopardise your conquering club no less.
So is your whole hand squeezed and in my power.
Oh happy omen of some future hour!*

H. O. S. W.



The Next Move

CHINARI

'SAHIB! Sahib! A Pathan Jemadar whose name is Shah Mohomad wishes to see you. I have put two chairs in the verandah and have asked him to wait until you finish dressing.'

'Offer the Jemadar a cigarette and tell him that I will not be long.'

'Very good, Sahib.'

I little dreamt then that death was calling, but a visitor at that hour was not unusual and my bearer's voice was normal. I congratulated myself again at having dismissed that troublemaker Sher Khan from the bungalow staff. Had he been on duty then, he would not have bothered about a chair and would have left the visitor standing, judging from previous experience.

There was another reason also that I was glad Sher Khan had gone. It is not wise in the hot weather in a Pakistani military cantonment of the North-West to have two inside servants who dislike each other as much as did Sher Khan and my bearer Ghulam Mohomad. Tempers are apt to rise with the heat.

The bearer was typical in every way. He was a short man, somewhat squat-nosed, dark, fat, and middle-aged, with a beard. He looked a servant and did not pretend to be well-born. But his eyes were good. He was well-trained,

quietly efficient, very reliable, clean, and hard-working. No wonder sparks flew at times. Fortunately he was no Hindu, but as good a follower of the Prophet as was Sher Khan.

The latter, on the other hand, considered himself to be as well-bred and as good as, or better than, anyone in the world. He was the cat's whiskers, so to speak, or, in other words, a Pathan of Pathans.

He had been, up to a few days before, a servant of mine for some years, having originally served in my old Frontier regiment up on the border. Apparently he had had many jobs after taking his discharge, and I found him unhappily pretending to work at a petrol-pump in Pindi. I needed a sort of civilian orderly, so I took him on. But after many trials at every sort of work I had to dismiss him. He was idle, dirty, insolent, and quarrelsome. It was obvious that he was too proud to work as a servant.

However, I liked him for some queer reason, as I like most Pathans, even though, when I dismissed him, he made some vague threat in an insolent manner. But I had paid little heed, thinking that he was but nursing his hurt pride and that later he would be bound to realise what a very fair deal he had had. He knew, too, that I liked him, for I had told him

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many times that this was the only reason I kept him on at all.

Despite his dirty appearance, he was really a most handsome and splendid-looking young man. He was tall, slim, and of good build. His features were in the Grecian style, and he had blue eyes, with comparatively fair hair. He had, too, the usual Pathan haircut and love-curl, while his puggaree was tied Pathan fashion, though with an extra-rakish devil-may-care air.

Like most Pathans, he was obviously only too keen on the trans-border code for the protection of personal and family honour. A most violent death is apt to follow any insult, or even a slight, real, accidental, or imagined. The code is a somewhat tricky business, as the vendettas which result from such murders can last a lifetime and may wipe out whole families on occasion. But apart from this aspect, and the weak points already mentioned, Sher Khan had all the Pathan manliness which attracts us so much to these folk.

AS visitors with urgent business often came to see me in the hot weather at evening changing-time, I did not hurry with my bath, but wondered just what this particular chap, whoever he was, might want. I usually bathe and change when approaching darkness stops daylight work on the files which I always seem to have to bring home. It is the one time in the day when I can be sure of getting a little time to myself. So I did not hurry, as I have said, but wondered why it was I could not place my visitor's name. I decided that, as it was the furlough season, he would be acting for the permanent holder of his post, who was probably on leave or sick.

What happened next is peculiar. Before going out to Jemadar Shah Mohomad, I slipped a small loaded .32 automatic into the pocket of my dressing-gown. I always kept one about. Now I had never received a visitor in this way before, and there was no reason why I should have done so on this occasion. My action seems to have been purely instinctive.

I then went out into the verandah, with my hand over the revolver butt, as much to hide the bulge and conceal the weapon from general notice as for any other reason. There is never much privacy in the East, and certainly not in the verandah of the ordinary bungalow. Servants, too, chatter a lot in the bazaar and

all one does or says is widely known almost at once.

As I went towards my visitor I noticed that he was in army uniform. He gave me a first-class salute. I gave him the usual Pushtu greeting and remarked: 'I do not think we have met before, Jemadar Sahib. What can I do for you?' I thought: 'What a fine-looking chap', never dreaming, of course, that his really smart salute was in effect intended as a sort of graveyard salutation!

Memory fails me as to what it was he came about. All that I can now recall is that our conversation about the matter, and his statement as to his unit, gave no cause for suspicion as to his bona fides. I had seen that his shoulder-titles bore the name of the unit he had mentioned as his own.

When we had settled his problem, whatever it was, I switched the talk to the usual one of water and crops. It turned out that I knew the Frontier district he hailed from, and his village, near Pabbi, is not far from Peshawar.

I think it was at this point that I noticed that the extreme smartness of the man was somewhat spoilt by one undone tunic button and a slight bulge below. As I was wondering at this, it slowly dawned on me that his unit, not being a Pathan one, would normally have none of his class in it.

On my looking more closely at him, it seemed to me that he was very like—by Heaven, it really was Sher Khan, my sacked orderly, in disguise! He had done the job extremely well. His moustache was shaved off, his figure beautifully padded to take away his slimness, and his uniform was immaculate. I should never have spotted him but for the daylight fading a bit later that evening. He would never have worn those shoulder-titles had he dreamt that his timing would be a little out.

Only one meaning was possible. All the old sayings about Pathans and their too hasty methods of satisfying their honour sprang to my mind. I realised my folly and now understood more than ever the reasons why none of the border tribes are given private employment.

AS I talked to Sher Khan I considered if my best plan would not be to tell him that he was recognised, that I had him covered, and to send my bearer for the police. But I decided that he would not stand for it. It

THE NEXT MOVE

would mean firing as he sprang, and the initiative would be his. Besides, it was just possible that I might miss.

The only alternative seemed to be to force the issue another way. I could tell this fake Jemadar all about my ex-orderly, letting him suspect that I was armed, but not that I had tumbled to his disguise. Then, if nothing had happened, I should try to soothe his hurt pride and talk until I could see that his anger had cooled. It might just work. At least there was a chance of avoiding bloodshed. But could I do it? I must try, I realised, and at once, because it was now almost dark and the initiative must be mine. Time had to be on my side.

I marked with my eye an imaginary line across the verandah over which I must not let him pass, and I thanked God for the revolver in my pocket as I slipped the safety-catch forward slowly, praying that it would not click. It did not.

Directly the man's real name was mentioned. I saw for a split-second the murder glare in his eyes, and that they flashed to my right hand in its pocket. Immediately I moved it a little, and he shot another glance at it. I had certainly made no mistake as to his true identity. No need to wonder about the undone button and the bulge. The latter must be a knife. I had so often examined those Pathan knives, and the shape about fitted. Not only would such a weapon be quicker for him, already skilled in the art probably, but, more important, he would not risk the noise of a shot after dark. But I did not insult the border by imagining that he would have hesitated to steal a revolver had he really wanted one.

Had my right hand not been in my pocket, there is no doubt as to what Sher Khan's reaction would have been. It is the way of the breed. But now was the crucial moment. Would my acting be as good as his? And, granted that, might not the rest of the story of the sacked orderly cause his hidden knife to flash, even though he knew that I was armed? But I was reasonably sure he did not suspect that I had recognised him. My being armed he would put down to a decent carelessness, the sort his kind go in for themselves. In any case, now the risk had started and I was too far committed. There was no way left but to continue.

Again I thanked God, but this time for my fluency in the language, and I lost no time, not a second, in emphasising what a brave-hearted

chap this Sher Khan really was, but that I could not keep a man who refused to blend, was idle and quarrelsome, and so on, but that perhaps the fault was largely mine for trying to fit a round peg into a square hole, making a warrior into a servant, in other words, and that I was sure that Sher Khan, in some more suitable post, which unfortunately I could not offer him, would doubtless soon prove himself to be smart, hardworking, and a man of the highest honour.

He listened attentively, although grimly is really the fitter word. I realised that I must not go on too long about my ex-orderly. It might excite the man's anger again and spoil everything. So I changed the subject and watched him all the closer. This was the moment, and I tensed myself for action. Would my plan work?

His silence seemed never to end, although in reality it must have been brief. He made a slight movement, and I tightened my grip on the butt, taking the first trigger-squeeze. Was he—but no. He was trying to smile and attempting to appear at ease. Thank Heaven! A sort of smile came, a sickly grin, I thought afterwards, but at the time I only felt relief that his tenseness had relaxed.

He began forcing himself to speak, and agreed with all I was talking about, the usual Eastern custom: 'Yes, Sahib,' 'Without doubt, Sahib,' and so on. I went on talking as hard as I could—of hockey, polo, big-game shooting. I cannot say how long my effort continued, but it felt ages before Sher Khan appeared calm enough for me to let him go. When I felt that that was the case, I gave the usual permission for him to leave.

'Salaam, Sahib,' and with a second salute as good as the first, but yet with something about it not quite the same, he turned and left me.

AS Sher Khan's footsteps died away I shouted to the bearer to bring me a drink. I was wet through! I sat down for a bit to think things over and consider what action I should take.

Even if you cannot acknowledge the source of the intuition which made me put that revolver in my pocket, I hope that you can admire Sher Khan's superb acting and his efficient planning, his 'borrowed' equipment, and his detailed researches into the activities of a non-Pathan unit. It was all pretty good

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for an uneducated ex-sepoy almost mad with lust for revenge for an imagined injury. Or do you not agree?

Thank goodness the execution of his dastardly scheme was not quite so efficient as his preparatory work on it. His big error lay in arriving at my bungalow just a few minutes too soon, before it was too dark for me to notice clearly faces and things such as buttons and badges. But he knew my habits well, and planned accordingly. He had to catch me at home and then put on an act to put me off my guard. He could have, of course, waylaid me almost anywhere, but not often was I alone except in a car.

No, his idea to kill me at home was by far the best plan. He knew that I always saw evening visitors in the verandah, where the only light after dark came from the electric-bulb of the front room. He could not have left his visit till later, or he might miss me, as he knew. He would have known, too, the exact time of darkness, and how quickly the sun sets in the East. He would have carefully timed the whole affair, and I can only suspect that his watch that day was a trifle fast!

I found out later that Sher Khan had had a longish chat with the bearer before I saw him, and Ghulam Mohomad, as I have suggested earlier, was no fool and cordially disliked him. Yet the deception was complete. That success surely was the acid test inducing Sher Khan to carry on with his undertaking. If he could hoodwink one of his own kind, how much easier it would be to take me in. If any Pathan murder-plot deserved success, this one did. I have known many murders for revenge which were not half so well planned.

IT suddenly struck me that perhaps Sher Khan might have second thoughts about giving up his attempt, and even now might be waiting for me outside somewhere. 'Bearer,' I called, 'I forgot to tell that Jemadar something. Just see if he is too far away to call back.'

'Atcha, Sahib.'

I did not intend to let the servants know who my visitor was, or what had happened. They would only panic and bolt perhaps. I sat quietly listening to the bearer's footsteps, out and back, quite unhurried. Grand, I was clearly let off then.

'No, Huzoor, he is gone, and there is no one in sight, but I can take a chit to his lines.'

'No need for that, Ghulam Mohomad. It is not important. You can lock up now, as I am off to the Mess.'

'Very good, Sahib. Salaam.'

'Salaam, bearer.'

Armed with a heavier revolver and a torch, I set off by car for the unit which Sher Khan had pretended to belong to. The police would check up there, so I must get evidence on the question of identity before going to them.

As my big American car roared into life, I had a sudden fear that I should be caught napping as I slowed down at the gate where there were bushes and deep shadow. Sher Khan might have hidden too well and eluded my bearer's sharp eyes, or, indeed, he might have returned. So I drove out of the place as fast as driving with one hand—the other held my gun—and the size of the gateway permitted.

My powerful headlamps lit up the wide dusty cantonment road, with all its trees and bushes, as if it were broad daylight. I could see clearly that it really was deserted, and I breathed more freely. How silly! The bearer would not make a mistake like that. He has never let me down. Besides, I know that Sher Khan only came to the bungalow as he would not risk a shot at a car or at night. So, putting the revolver down on the seat beside me, I took the wheel in both hands and wondered what the police would do in the matter.

Just at that very second a figure stepped out from a dark patch on the right of the road and raised his hand. I braked violently, at the same time covering the man with the revolver. I had actually started to press the trigger, when the well-known voice of my fat Bengali head clerk called out: 'Sir, English mail. I was coming to the bungalow when I saw the car. Good-night, sir.'

Again I had to wipe my forehead, but thank the Lord he never saw in the darkness what I held in my right hand as I took the letters with the other. As it was, he will not know how near he was that night to the Hindu burning-ghat.

ON arrival at the office of Sher Khan's supposed unit, I quickly verified from the night-duty clerk that no Pathan was attached to the battalion. So I went on to the bungalow of the Superintendent of Police. After some discussion, we finally agreed that next morning his men would find Sher Khan, accidentally on

THE NEXT MOVE

purpose, and tell him that they had a railway-ticket to Peshawar for him.

And so it happened. Yes, the ticket had come from the Sahib. Yes, the Sahib might have forgotten to send it before, or perhaps his bearer had forgotten. After some hesitation he took the ticket and later the railway police reported that he duly boarded the train, adding that they would check him through to his destination before placing his name on the lists of the Peshawar C.I.D. Apparently he had been dressed once again in the dirty old clothes I knew so well, though only Heaven knows how many new white suits I had given him. The police also mentioned that they had found some evidence regarding the uniform he had stolen.

Police Superintendent Abdullah had been very firm as to wanting the man out of the station as quickly as possible, also as to putting a guard on my bungalow at night, until he was safely in the hands of the Frontier police, otherwise they would not be responsible for my life. And did I agree! What would you have done?

TWO nights later a noise woke me up, voices outside the door. It could not be that fellow again, I thought. But no. I could make out the bearer, another sounded like one of my police guard, but the third was that of the Police Superintendent. I saw that it was only about 4 a.m. and hoped that the visit was to report Sher Khan's arrival at Peshawar and not that he had returned and was arrested. On going out to the men, I found Abdullah with some of his sepoys waiting for me. 'I am sorry, Sahib, to disturb you at this hour,' he smiled, 'but I had to come without delay to warn you that Sher Khan gave our chaps the slip when he changed trains at Nowshera, or so they say. As far as I can make out, there is no proof that he suspected he was being trailed, so it is possible he intended to stay for a while at Nowshera. Or it may be that our men merely missed him and that he is actually in the Peshawar train now—you know what those station crowds are like. But in any case, until he has been located, I do not want you to leave the bungalow. One never knows in these revenge cases what trickery may be in store for us, shortly, or after years and years. Besides, I hate military funerals!'

'Nonsense, Abdullah,' I exclaimed. 'If you think that I am going to stay in all to-day for

that scallywag, you have another think! But I will be careful, I promise you.—Bearer, bring tea and two cups, with lots of sugar. And mind, say nothing to the other servants about Sher Khan. It is nothing for you to worry about either.'

'Sahib, it is understood. But if you give the order, I will warn the others. Then we will be very cunning and will pretend to hate thee and plot with Sher Khan. Thus we will gain his confidence, and so the police shall catch this son of a pig. I know these Pathan badmashes. He will return, Sahib, this year or next, or later maybe, but surely he will return. His fate is written, and it is the prison, or my name is not Ghulam Mohomad.'

'No, the man has committed no crime. Forget it, and bring the tea quickly.'

Grumbling, he went off and came back with the tea almost at once. This made me think that Abdullah's passion for sweet tea was shared by the bearer's family! We were sipping our second cups and enjoying a cigarette, but still disagreeing, when a police runner arrived with a message to the effect that Sher Khan had got out of the train at Peshawar after all.

So that was all right. But did I chaff Abdullah? Well, not much, for, after all, one does want to keep on the right side of the police.

WE believed now that I had really finished with Sher Khan. Having left the station for the Frontier, there was little likelihood that he would return all that way just to murder me, having given up the idea once. Indeed, by the following Christmas I had completely forgotten the episode. But in the midst of the usual festivities there arrived a Christmas-card from him! Obviously the envelope, and his name on the card inside, had been written by a bazaar writer, for Sher Khan could not read or write. But what could it mean?

Of course, many non-Christian Pakistanis send Christmas-cards to Europeans merely as a way of conveying greetings. I thought at first that Sher Khan had adopted this idea, possibly with an eye to another job later! However, whatever his exact reason might be for thus greeting me, it seemed certain that I was entitled to pat myself on the back, just a little, for my part in the deception.

But, alas, I am now not quite so sure that

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my acting was so good after all. Back in England for a bit I am told that I look closely at all Pakistanis who pass by. You see, last Christmas mail brought me another card from my Pathan friend. Not only was it addressed

direct to my home, but the writing was in red ink! Of course, Easterners do like using coloured inks, but their usual favourite is mauve, and why should he have chosen such an unsuitable colour?

A Lewis Carroll Rarity

G. LEATHER

CLEARING out the debris left behind by the previous owner from an old writing-desk bought recently at auction brought to light a curious Lewis Carroll item almost deserving the epithet 'unknown'. Booksellers who have seen it had never before heard of it, despite their professional interest in such rarities.

The item, which is in almost the virgin condition in which it left the printer's hands over sixty years ago—it is dated 1890—consists, firstly, of a flimsy pink envelope on which is printed:

THE 'WONDERLAND'
POSTAGE-STAMP-CASE

Invented by LEWIS CARROLL

This case contains 12 separate pockets for Stamps of different values, and 2 Coloured Pictorial Surprises taken from 'Alice in Wonderland'. It is accompanied with the Booklet 8 or 9 Wise Words about Letter-Writing, by Lewis Carroll.

Published by MESSRS. EMBERLIN AND SON
4, Magdalen Street, Oxford
Price 1s.

Inside the envelope, along with the booklet mentioned, is the stamp-case itself, measuring 3½ inches by 4 and consisting of a cardboard wallet containing twelve silk-sewn pockets for postage-stamps of ½d. to 1s. values; also a slip-in case of linen-backed paper to hold the wallet. On the front and back of the slip-in case are pictures in colour.

On the front, Alice is seen holding the Duchess's baby: on the back is the Cheshire Cat crouched on the branch of a tree. On withdrawing the wallet from its case, the same pictures are seen, except that the baby in Alice's arms has changed into a nightcapped pig, while of the Cheshire Cat on the back almost nothing at all is now visible but its Smile.

Below the Cheshire Cat on the back of the case is the legend, in somewhat illogical order:

(Post Free, 13d.)
PRICE ONE SHILLING

The wallet itself has on the back, above and below the Smile: Invented by Lewis Carroll MDCCCLXXXIX.

For an explanation of the purpose of the stamp-case, one turns to the little booklet, of thirty-nine pages, described on its cover as 'Eight or Nine Wise Words about Letter-Writing', and bearing the date 1890. The booklet consists of five chapters, entitled: 'On Stamp Cases', 'How to begin a Letter', 'How to go on with a Letter', 'How to end a Letter', and 'On registering Correspondence'.

THE first chapter, in which the characteristic Carrollisms will be noted, begins: 'SOME American writer has said "the snakes in this district may be divided into one species —the venomous". The same principle applies here. Postage-Stamp-Cases may be divided

A LEWIS CARROLL RARITY

into one species, the "Wonderland". Imitations of it will soon appear, no doubt: but they cannot include the two Pictorial Surprises, which are copyright.

"You don't see why I call them "Surprises"? Well, take the Case in your left hand, and regard it attentively. You see Alice nursing the Duchess's Baby? [An entirely new combination, by the way: it doesn't occur in the book.] Now, with your right thumb and forefinger, lay hold of the little book, and suddenly pull it out. *The Baby has turned into a Pig!* If that doesn't surprise you, why, I suppose you wouldn't be surprised if your own Mother-in-law suddenly turned into a Gyroscope.

"This Case is *not* intended to carry about in your pocket. Far from it. People seldom want any other Stamps, on an emergency, than Penny-Stamps for Letters, Sixpenny-Stamps for Telegrams, and a bit of Stamp-edging for cut fingers (it makes capital sticking-plaster, and will stand three or four washings, cautiously conducted): and all these are easily carried in a purse or pocket-book. No, *this* is meant to haunt your envelope-case, or wherever you keep your writing materials. What made me invent it was the constantly wanting Stamps of other values, for foreign Letters, Parcel Post, &c., and finding it very bothersome to get at the kind I wanted in a hurry. Since I have possessed a "Wonderland Stamp Case," Life has been bright and peaceful, and I have used no other. I believe the Queen's laundress uses no other."

Older readers will recognise in the last two sentences an oblique reference to a once-famous soap advertisement.

THE three chapters on beginning, continuing, and ending a letter are redolent of the time, over sixty years ago, before letter-writing, assailed by such influences as the telephone, vastly improved travel facilities, and the modern urge to employ leisure in living life more breathlessly, had begun its decline as an art and a social grace. Even to-day, however, few will fail to profit by one or more of the following 'wise words' dispensed by the author:

"Here is a golden Rule to begin with. Write legibly. A great deal of the bad writing in the world comes simply from writing too quickly. Of course, you reply, "I do it to save time." A very good object, no doubt: but what right

have you to do it at your friend's expense? Isn't his time as valuable as yours?

"My second Rule is, don't fill more than a page and a half with apologies for not having written sooner! The best subject to begin with is your friend's last letter. Answer his questions and make any remarks his letter suggests. Then go on to what you want to say yourself. This arrangement is more courteous, and pleasanter for the reader, than to fill the letter with your own invaluable remarks, and then hastily answer your friend's questions in a postscript.

"A few Rules may be given here for correspondence that has unfortunately become controversial. When you have written a letter that you feel may possibly irritate your friend, however necessary you may have felt it to so express yourself, put it aside till the next day. Then read it over again and fancy it addressed to yourself. This will often lead to your writing it all over again, taking out a lot of the vinegar and pepper, and putting in honey instead, and thus making a much more palatable dish of it. If your friend makes a severe remark, either leave it unnoticed or make your reply distinctly less severe. If, in picking a quarrel, each party declined to go more than three-eighths of the way and was ready, in making friends, to go five-eighths of the way—why, there would be more reconciliations than quarrels! Which is like the Irishman's remonstrance to his gadabout daughter—"Shure, you're *always* goin' out! You go out three times for wanst that you come in!" My last remark about controversial correspondence is, don't try to have the last word! (If you are a gentleman, and your friend a lady, this Rule is superfluous: you won't get the last word!)

"My eighth Rule. When you say, in your letter, "I enclose cheque for £5," or "I enclose John's letter for you to see", leave off writing for a moment, go and get the document referred to, and put it into the envelope. Otherwise, you are pretty certain to find it lying about after the post has gone.

"A Postscript is a very useful invention: but it is not meant (as so many ladies suppose) to contain the real gist of the letter: it serves rather to throw into the shade any little matter we do not wish to make a fuss about.

"When you take your letters to the Post, carry them in your hand. If you put them in your pocket you will take a long country walk (I speak from experience), passing the Post

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Office twice, going and returning, and, when you get home, will find them still in your pocket.'

APART from the first chapter, the most typically Carolean is the last, in which the author describes his system of recording in a register correspondence sent or received by him and his replies. Together with dates and other details are the names of the correspondents and a brief summary of the letters. Among the specimen entries illustrating the use of the register are the following:

'Ap. 1 (From) *Jones, Mrs.* Am sending, as present from self and Mr. J., a white elephant.

Ap. 4 (From) *Manager, Goods Station, G.N.R.* Case containing "White elephant—very savage" arrived, addressed to you. Send for it at once.

(To) *Jones, Mrs.* Thanks, but no room

for it at present. Am sending it to Zoological Gardens.

(To) *Manager, Goods Station, G.N.R.* Please deliver to bearer of this note, case containing White Elephant.

(To) *Director, Zoological Gardens*: (enclosing above note). Call for valuable animal, presented to Gardens.

Ap. 9 (From) *Director, Zoological Gardens*. Case delivered to us contained 1 doz. Port. Consumed at Director's banquet—many thanks.

(To) *Jones, Mrs.* Why call a doz. of Port a "White Elephant"?

Ap. 11 (From) *Jones, Mrs.* "It was a joke". Despite the light-hearted nature of these specimens, the register, described in great detail by the author, was obviously intended to be taken seriously as a system of keeping abreast of one's correspondence and preserving a brief record of its subject-matter for future reference.

The Automatic Automobile

MAURICE BENSLEY

IN the more placid era of the 'twenties and 'thirties none but dreamers and crackpots presumed to forecast futures for automobiles. But since then invention and design and manufacturing ingenuity have pointed the way more clearly. We can now predict the future fairly accurately, and the vision is the more solid because parts of it are already materialising.

The convenience of telephoning from the car can be imagined. This facility already exists in part in the United States and in Sweden. Two slender 20-inch aerials reach upwards from a vibration-proof instrument attached to the dashboard, which is connected by radio with the ordinary telephone system. Many taxicabs in Britain are similarly equip-

ped for communication with their area headquarters. In time the device will be commonplace, giving a car independent telephone service. The motorist will simply telephone as he drives, for a reservation at a hotel some distance ahead, or for whatever else he may especially need.

Probables which will find favour with many are a fitted barometer, and an altimeter, for measuring hills. One car manufacturer has already fitted these experimentally to one of his models. The same car boasts self-raising gear, giving independence from outside breakdown service should one get bogged, drive a wheel into a ditch, or be otherwise immobilised; and there is mounted also a cine-camera which enables the driver to shoot

THE AUTOMATIC AUTOMOBILE

any scene he fancies. A weather-forecasting barometer will be an asset when touring. So will a dioramic map, a device under test. This sits in a small cabinet attached to the instrument-panel. Synchronised with the speedometer, your route unrolls before you as the car proceeds.

Incessant efforts to deal conclusively with the perennial problem of whether and when and where to dim or dip or black-out headlights now point the way to two promising alternatives. They translate the problem to the realm of electronics. In the first alternative, one of your own lamps acts on a photo-electric cell in an oncoming car, and mechanism switches on its dimmer. The other driver's headlamps do the same for you. The second alternative transfers the operation from car to road. A length of road is illuminated by lighting coming from the highway itself. Controlled by photo-cells, the left half of the road is lighted for about 400 feet in front of a speeding car, reverting to darkness when the car has passed. As the vehicle proceeds, so it automatically operates similar electronic illuminators set at regular intervals along the highway. Probably such an innovation, if not too costly to install, would obviate altogether the need for headlights on major roads.

ALL this is part of the trend towards automation. There is no doubt about the tendency. A driver's act of leaving his seat will automatically apply the handbrake. If he leaves his engine running for more than three minutes, a delayed timing-device will switch it off. An idea from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents is that a signal should be fitted to the front of a car to give notice of the driver's intention to stop, or not stop, for pedestrians waiting at crossings. A variation of this is aimed at providing fuller information for the car behind. Miniature traffic-lights on the rear bumper would, by varying pressures on the brake-pedal, show three lights—green, amber, and red—instead of one, giving timely advices to the drivers of following cars.

All these automatic controls and signals, and some others, are practicable from the inherent electricity supply. But much more auto-operation is envisaged through auxiliary electric-motors. In some cases these would assist the usual manual operations, in others they would carry them out entirely. Two

items in the first category are braking and steering.

Power-helped brakes are not in fact new; they have been standard on some commercial vehicles for years. Their use on passenger cars is, however, new. The advantage of the power-booster is that it works quickly, reducing the time taken to stop the car. And, as the device does most of the pedal-pushing for you, braking requires only a gentle foot-pressure. Also, if the power system fails, you can still work the brakes, using the normal foot-pressure.

Power-steering does for the turning mechanism what power-brakes do for the braking system. Provided the engine is running, the front wheels can be deflected by little more than finger-pressure on the steering-wheel. The principle is relatively simple. The normal steering movements operate a valve which brings into play either a hydraulic pump or a motor to supplement the effort of the driver. It takes a little while to accustom oneself to this effortless turning, then one grows to prefer it. The difference is noticeable at all times, but particularly when driving on poor roads, or through mud or snow. The job is made so much easier, and there is better control in emergencies requiring split-second judgment.

Examples of full power-assisted control are seat-adjustments, and the manipulation of windows and hood. These are operated by press-buttons on the dashboard. Both are tempting extras, though neither contributes to safety or economy. And power window-lifts may bruise a lot of young fingers before one's children have learned to keep their hands out of the way.

THIS push-button technique extends to some of the motor-vehicle factories where these devices are fitted. There, new machinery is continuously turning out vast numbers of finished products, but is tended by a mere handful of men. In one such factory a mighty machine, covering acres of ground, transforms rough castings into finished motor-cylinder blocks. The process involves 532 separate operations, all of them automatic. Where hundreds of operatives were employed before, there is now need for only a few men—'job-setters'—whose role is simply to watch instrument-panels to ascertain how production is proceeding. If a warning light flashes, it

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points unerringly to where some hitch has occurred, telling the watchers exactly where adjustments must be made.

The next development in these automatic factories is expected to be a more extensive use of electronic brains. A probable example is electronic apparatus which would be capable of determining when and which machinery was worn and needed replacing. It would also stop a machine when this had completed the number of items the apparatus had been told to produce.

A SOURCE of great sorrow to car-makers is that much engine-heat goes to waste. Thus—so far experimentally—excess heat is being tapped at the flick of a switch to heat soup or coffee while the car is under way. Plug-in points give facilities for such needs as an electric-razor. These are extras which will appeal to long-distance tourists, commercial travellers, and others who put their cars to the fullest use. Another is a device which in effect is a movable partition that temporarily screens off the rear space as a feminine preserve—a kind of private tidying-up room.

Temporarily, the function of the windscreens-wiper may be broadened. For instance, nobby little individual squeegees have been fitted to headlamps on one make of car undergoing endurance contests. But the long-term probability is that windscreens-wipers will themselves be out-moded by the new chemical substances called silicones. These are a distant cousin of the transparent greases which in pre-wiper days we used to smear over the windshield when rain seemed imminent. Generally the application had to be repeated before every downpour. But silicones, painted on glass, form a colourless film which sheds water as efficiently as the back of a duck, and a single treatment will last for weeks.

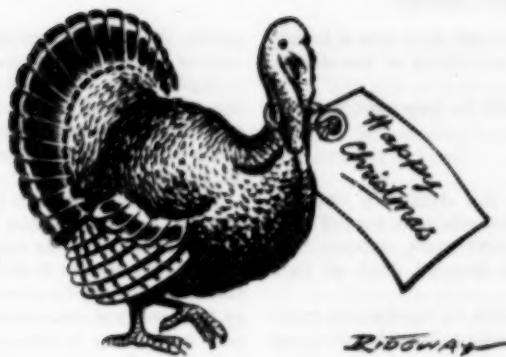
THOSE hoping to travel at greater speeds will draw no consolation from the expert view that, for the ordinary motorist, the internal-combustion engine is now virtually at its safety-limit for speed. Slight increases are likely by further variations in body-design, as, for instance, rear streamlining. Recent tests have underlined the professional view that, when speed is the chief need, it is more important to streamline the back of a car than its front. A streamlined front and a

square back may have twice the air-resistance offered by a relatively square front and a streamlined rear. A simple way to check an efficient streamline is to drive the car at high speed in wet weather. A bad shape would cause raindrops to collect on the rear window, but in good streamlining the rain-laden air should sweep straight past.

The happiest prospects for speed-seekers lie in the not improbable partial replacement of the present engine by units served by atomic energy, jet propulsion, or rocket power. In all respects cost will be the governing factor. But so far as concerns the many other individual improvements here mentioned, it is a comforting thought that each in its turn may conceivably be incorporated as a standard fixture in all new cars without materially affecting the overall price.

Meanwhile, motor-car owners will undoubtedly go on developing their own contributions towards the comfort and the time- and labour-saving efficiency of future motoring. A young research-worker has fitted his car with a compass to help guide him in fog, and a time-switch which operates at lighting-up time. Recently I drove home at night in the car of another motorist who had fitted a modest photo-cell installation to his garage. As we pulled up outside, the home-made apparatus welcomingly opened the doors and switched on the light.

THREE still remains to be told the extraordinary tale of the 'drive itself' car. This prodigy has in fact been tested on a stretch of circular road in the United States. The man aboard was there solely to report performance. He could otherwise have slept or watched the scenery, for the vehicle was steered by invisible hands impelled from a cable sunk in the roadway and contacting electronic receivers in the car. When the car attempted to leave the straight, the same impulses notified an amplifier which passed this intelligence on to a 'mechanical servant' which instantly turned the steering-axle to put the car back on course. If the car drew too close to a vehicle ahead, these controls jointly halted the car. If, however, there was a by-pass cable, they combined again to steer the car round the leading vehicle, to overtake it. The fantastic world of the future, so realistically foretold by H. G. Wells, draws steadily nearer.



A Proper Shemozzle

DOROTHY M. SCOFIELD

IF you were to move one way in our village, you might be doing yourself out of a free Christmas turkey. Or, on the other hand, if you were to move another way, you might be winning yourself one.

It's like this. Squire owns best part of the village—been in his family for generations—and it's always been the family's custom to rear a turkey apiece every year for the people living in their property. That's eleven families—nine cottages, the shop (that's me, Will Cousins), and one small farm. Squire himself favours goose, so that's what the staff at the manor get, like it or not.

Now, turkeys being tricky to rear, Squire always starts off with fifteen youngsters, allowing for losses. There are those in the village that hint Squire's got no right to cut things so fine, and we all get pretty jumpy near killing time.

Still, Squire's got a good poultryman, and every year we've got by till this Christmas just gone—and good riddance to it, for 'twas a proper shemozzle from start to finish.

Round about the beginning of October turkeys were all going strong, when one day Sam, the wheelwright, reports about dusk: 'Turkeys be down t'Galverston lane asittin' up a tree.'

Well, none of us didn't feel like leaving our Christmas dinners there for the night unprotected, on account of foxes and such. Then, again, Squire's poultryman was over to Plymouth visiting his sister and not one of us wanted to show greed by telling Squire about the risk he was taking by forgetting to shut the turkeys up for the night. Nor yet no one wouldn't lay hands on them for fear of doing them damage or scaring them away and being liable. So we set about planning a rota of able-bodied men to keep watch. And we just got it all shipshape, when up the lane came the turkeys at a smart trot ahead of a horde of yelling kids.

We let all the turkeys and most of the kids past, being 'mazed, but came to our senses in time to grab my boy, George.

'Well,' he says, virtuous, 'us see'd un up a tree and knowed Squire wouldn't want to lose un *all*, so us was takin' un home to shut un up.'

It's the 'all' we don't like. And rightly, it turns out.

Seemingly there was only eleven doing the turkey-trot up the lane, the others having skinned off across the fields too fast and far for the kids to follow.

Well, we don't waste time with moaning,

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but reorganise the watch rota into a search-party. But never a feather of the dratted things did we see.

That leaves us with the bare eleven and no safety-margin.

WE'D been in this dangerous situation for a few weeks, when the second blow falls. Squire's poultryman reports one turkey choked and dropped dead all in a minute.

Still, those of us with big families feel pretty secure even now, thinking Squire's sure to cut out one of the three one-person households in preference to us. That's Mrs Farmlea, widow; Joe Torr, farmer and widower these twenty years; and Silas Pitts, bachelor and rabbit-trapper.

Their claims not to be the one to go without seem equal to us, but Squire, being a gentleman, says, of course, the lady must have a turkey. And adds perhaps she will share with one of the men, making her own choice.

We'll never rightly know whether Squire knew what he was stirring up when he made that suggestion, but there was them as held he couldn't have helped knowing Farmer Torr been courting Mrs Farmlea these six years, and Silas Pitts eaten up with jealousy because he don't fancy his chances enough to start doing likewise. And right he is, too, most of us think, Joe Torr being a fine-set-up man, though a bit on the fat side for some tastes, while Silas is a mean sort of a fellow whatever way you look at him and in more ways than one.

However it was with Squire, the rest of us were prepared for a bit of excitement, thinking surely when Mrs Farmlea picked Joe Torr to share her Christmas dinner that would give him the pluck to pop the question—which we knew all right he couldn't have done yet on account of she would have accepted and got him to the altar double quick. That way we reckoned on a Christmas wedding in the parish.

But you never can tell with women, specially widows. As sweet as honey she was with both of them, but never a word did she give them to put them out of their misery.

NEXT thing that happened was that what we all regarded as Silas Pitts's turkey goes and falls sick and poultryman says it'll

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surely die before morning, unless it gets regular attention during the night.

Quicker than we can all look expectantly at him, Silas sets off for Squire's, well prepared with a borrowed flask of brandy in his pocket and a couple of rugs strapped on the back of his bicycle.

The brandy, he says, is for the turkey, and the rugs for to keep him warm if he gets a chance to snatch a few winks. However that may be, poultryman finds him come morning fast asleep in the barn with the empty flask in his hand and the turkey dead and stone-cold wrapped up in the rugs beside him.

Well, Squire having caught the early train to London that very morning, there's nothing we can do about it.

Then, around four o'clock in the afternoon, Silas comes into the shop. I get my commiserating look ready, but quickly see there's no call for it, because Silas is grinning all over his face. 'Proper row,' he says, casual like, 'goin' on up to Mrs Farmlea's.' And he opens the shop door so I can hear.

And hear I do. There's cows bellowing, kids shouting, women nattering, and, above all, what I take to be Joe Torr's voice raised in anger.

'Who's he calling a "damned old fule", then?' I ask.

Silas closes the door, careful, and 'Mrs F.' he says, still grinning.

'Whatever for?' I ask.

'For the little surprise her bin preparing for the village. It surprised old Joe all right and his—' At this he starts laughing fit to bust himself and I can't contain my curiosity no longer, so I lock up shop and nip up to Mrs Farmlea's.

First thing I see is Joe's cows coming down the lane towards me. I haven't got time to dally with them, though I know they ought to be going t'other way, it being milking-time and Joe's farm being up top of the village past Mrs Farmlea's.

As I turn the bend, I see a great white banner thing stretched across the road just above a tall man's head, attached to two poles stuck in the ground at either end. Worked on it in big red letters is:

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL WHAT WALKS BENEATH

Very nice it is, too. But Joe's cows don't think so, seemingly. Leastways, they're not

A PROPER SHEMOZZLE

accepting no invitation to a happy Christmas—not by walking under that banner.

And there's Mrs Farmlea with her hands folded across her middle and her lips all primed up, goggling at old Joe. He's just about purple in the face by now and demanding the blank thing be took down immediate, so's he can get his cows to the milking-shed afore they bust.

While he's pausing for breath, Mrs Farmlea looks over his head at the rest of us and wants to know: 'Where's Silas Pitts to, then?'

That, I suddenly remembers, no one knows barring me. 'Shut up in my shop,' I answers, feeling as near daft as I'll ever admit to.

But no one bant taking notice of me—they're all watching Mrs Farmlea for the next move, and she obliges by uppings with her dignity and sweeping towards her cottage. 'I'll take it kindly, Mr Cousins,' she flings at me over her shoulder, 'if you'll bide here till I write a note for you to take to Mr Pitts—an invitation it'll be for him to take dinner with me come Christmas Day!' And she tosses a look fit to kill at Joe before she goes in slamming the door behind her.

Joe, not to be bettered, puts his hand in his pocket and fetches out a package which he slaps into my hand. 'And I'll take it kindly, Will,' he booms in a voice calculated to reach anyone not more'n a couple of miles away, even if they are lurking behind a slammed door, 'if you'll take back the enclosed gloves and credit the full amount of their value to my account. If it have slipped your mind, Will, I'll remember you that they'm the best quality leather gloves, fur-lined, ordered special for me to give a certain lady come Christmas Day.'

Well, of course I don't need no reminding, seeing I'd only handed over the dratted things to Joe an hour before. But I do reckon he's hit on as neat a way of letting Mrs Farmlea know what she's missing as any I could have thought up myself.

'The full amount to be credited to me, Will,' he repeats, thinking I'm hesitating, 'they never having been worn.' Whereat he uproots the poles holding Mrs F.'s banner and chucks the whole shooting-match into the ditch, which is in full spate along of the rain we been having.

Then he takes off down the lane to fetch his cows, just as Mrs Farmlea brings out the invitation for Silas. While she's handing it over, I can see her looking sly-like from the

package containing the gloves to her banner lying in the ditch, and I can't help wondering if she'll be able to hold on to her temper. But she got a firm grip of herself, that's plain to all, so I reckon show's over and leg it back home as fast as I can.

WHEN I open the door, rather nervous, wondering what I shall find, there's Silas, as calm as you like, with all that's left of my Christmas gift stock spread out on the counter, picking it over. 'I might be wanting something special like for a lady friend,' he says cautiously.

'There bant no *might* about it,' I tell him quick. 'You'll have to be taking Mrs F. a gift in return for your dinner, same as Joe was planning on doing if he'd have been the lucky man—which he bant.' And I hands him Mrs Farmlea's note, which he reads aloud.

'Dear Mr Pitts,' it says, 'I should be obliged if you would come to Christmas dinner with me at 3 sharp. Yours truly, A. Farmlea.'

And now, I reckon, is the right moment to show him the gloves.

Well, he turns them over and over for quite a time before he gives me one of his ferrety looks and says: 'Kind of second-hand they'd be by this time, wouldn't they, Will?'

So, of course, I have to drop the price a bit before he'll take them—which I'm forced to do, not knowing where else I'll find a market.

AFTER that it doesn't take the womenfolk long to start getting ideas about an Easter wedding for Silas and Mrs Farmlea. And we all go to church Christmas morning expecting to see Silas tucked in cozy alongside the widow in her pew.

But we're wrong. Mrs Farmlea's pew is empty and Silas is sitting alone behind the third pillar on the right, same as always.

We're just beginning to think the widow must have changed her mind again and run off with Joe Torr, when in comes Joe himself—alone and wearing a disgruntled look pretty nigh as black as Silas's.

Now this is a mystery what won't wait till the end of the service. So, after the collection, I make it my business to slip into an empty seat beside Silas and pretty soon I get the whole story.

Mrs F., it appears, has skipped in the dead of

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night. Over to her niece's at Allingham she's skipped, along with the turkey and all she'd prepared for her and Silas's dinner. She'd put a note through Silas's door to tell him her niece'd been took ill suddenly and she hoped Silas would forgive her for taking the turkey with her—which she'd had to do on account of not knowing what she'd find in the larder over at Allingham.

Naturally, Silas isn't in no forgiving mood and, if he had of been, it wouldn't have got him no Christmas dinner.

I consider the situation careful like for the rest of the service and come to the conclusion that it be too big by half even for my handling. So as we're filing out shaking hands with Vicar and Squire, I manage to be last. That way I have a few words with Squire in private, and tip him the wink that two of his tenants are going dinnerless seemingly, and through no fault of their own, but along of the whims of the widow and the trickiness of turkeys.

'Don't worry, Will,' Squire says, 'I'll send them some goose from my kitchen.' Which I have to be content with, in spite of knowing neither of them can't abide goose.

But, after my own dinner, my curiosity as to how Joe and Silas have made out starts to get the better of me. So I say to the wife that I'll walk up and offer to help Joe with his milking—that having to be done, Christmas or no Christmas.

To which she answers, peeking out of the window, that Joe already got help seemingly.

Sure enough, there's Joe and Silas coming teetering down towards us doing the goose-step, their arms around each other's necks.

And it be clear to all that the pair of them have been brought to terms over their common suffering at the hands of Mrs Farmlea and over the liberal washing down of the Squire's goose.

So soon as they catch sight of me, Joe says: 'My friend here do have a great favour to ask of you, Will.'

Of course, I know what that is before ever Silas gets the gloves out of his pocket, and, as I takes them, I say sarcastic: 'And will I kindly credit the full value of the enclosed to Silas—they never having been worn?'

But that isn't the all of it. 'Silas have something else on his mind,' Joe goes on, looking at Silas, who fidgets from one foot to another.

'Well,' Silas gets out at last, 'tis this way. You being full of turkey instead of goose and in consequence having no hard feelings against a certain party—we thought you had ought to offer they gloves to the party concerned, greatly reduced, come the spring sale. Us thought t'would make up to her in some measure for having lost a couple of likely husbands.'

Which I done, having no choice—they being, in a manner of speaking, third hand by now.

Skullduggery in Science

T. S. DOUGLAS

THE exposure of the remains dug up in Sussex and famous for forty years as the Piltdown Skull now seems to be complete. They have been called by the experts of the British Museum 'a deliberate fake'. The distinguished scientists who took part in the excavations and afterwards built elaborate

theories about the evolution of Man on the discoveries were 'victims of a most elaborate and carefully-prepared hoax'. It seems that the Piltdown Skull will go down in history as one of the greatest scientific hoaxes. Certainly it had the longest run and probably deceived the greatest number of people, for it was very

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elaborately carried out and prepared with great skill.

Some experts had their doubts from the first, but only the perfection of new and more delicate analytical techniques made it possible to show that the Piltdown jaw was, in fact, that of a modern ape, very skilfully treated.

It seems unlikely that it will ever be possible to repeat such a hoax, but Piltdown Man is only the latest example of many hoaxes which show that men of science and learning are by no means proof against being taken in and erecting on the imagination of a hoaxter an elaborate series of deductions and even a complete philosophy.

If we examine the various famous scientific hoaxes, we find that the feature they have in common is topicality. At different times, different sciences and questions are in the news, not merely with the general public, but also with scientific philosophers. The Piltdown Man was very much on the target at a time when the origin of Man was receiving a great deal of attention and even the smallest bits of material evidence were being eagerly seized to support or oppose various views. The characteristics of the jaw were just those that some scientists expected and hoped would be found at some time. The hoaxter's success depended on producing something that was credible because it was scientifically possible.

The origin and evolution of Man is still a subject of great interest, but more is now known and, improved techniques for examination of remains apart, it is doubtful whether a hoax of the same kind as the Piltdown Man would hit the headlines and hold them. The hoaxter to-day would probably have more success in the realm of atomic energy or space travel.

PERHAPS the nearest approach to the Piltdown Skull was the so-called 'Cardiff Giant'. On 9th October 1869 men digging a well on a farm near Cardiff in the State of New York struck what was thought to be a rock, but which on closer investigation proved to be the 'petrified' figure of a man, lying on his side with his knees drawn up as if in pain. It was obviously very old, and grooves in places suggested wear by water. The man was a very big one, and was popularly christened the 'Cardiff Giant'.

The figure attracted enormous attention, and not merely the public, but also men of

learning, flocked to examine it when it was exhibited first of all on the site and later in New York and Boston. Some scientists were very sceptical about whether, in fact, it was the figure of a man petrified by limestone waters, but eminent divines accepted it eagerly, because it provided visual evidence of fundamentalism. The text: 'There were giants in the earth in those days' was used for many sermons, listeners being told that they could see proof of the literal truth of the Bible in the Cardiff Giant. Palaeontologists expressed some doubt about the age of the figure, but the company which was formed to own and exhibit it managed to secure some imposing names in the world of divinity and education for its advertisements.

It was not until after nine years that the Cardiff Giant was completely exposed as a hoax. The hoax was perpetrated by a tobacconist who was an agnostic, and he said that his motive was simply to make a fool of a minister with whom he had had disputes. Whatever the original motive, there is no doubt that when the perpetrators found that the deception was swallowed complete by the public, they exploited it for money. Tens of thousands of pounds were paid by the curious to see the figure. Barnum, after failing to buy it, had a copy made, which he showed as 'the original Cardiff Giant'!

The hoaxter took great trouble and went to some expense to ensure his success. After studying rocks and fossils, he found a large slab of limestone and secretly engaged a stonemason to work on it. The slab had to be carried by road, and an accident resulted in its being broken. In consequence, the figure had to be made shorter, and hence the 'drawn up legs in pain', which were so convincing. The figure was aged by being beaten with a leaden mallet and stained. It was secretly buried on the farm and left for a year before workmen, who, of course, were completely ignorant of the hoax, were instructed to dig a well at the spot. The Cardiff Giant is a model for the hoaxter, but it is only right to point out that it did not deceive many eminent scientists and would not have lasted a week under modern conditions.

IN an earlier age the wonders of new worlds being visited by explorers from Europe for the first time gave the hoaxter his chance. Some of the hoaxes were no more than

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travellers' tales, but others became classics. Perhaps the most notable of the earlier hoaxes was that of the man who called himself Psalmanazar and managed to persuade an army chaplain, the Bishop of London, and many of the learned men of his time that he was a Formosan. His *Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*, published in 1704, is a considerable feat of imagination.

His deception, of which he repented in his later years, would not have been successful if he had not produced a fairly consistent account of the manners and customs of the Formosans and a 'language' near enough to reality to take in the learned men at the universities.

At the end of the last century Louis de Rougemont showed a fertility of imagination no less than that of Psalmanazar. His extraordinary narratives of strange Australian tribes were endorsed as credible by eminent geographers and he was invited to appear before the British Association for the Advancement of Science. This was his undoing, for he could not survive question-time and broke down over the language.

De Rougemont's real name is said to have been Louis Grin, and he was certainly in Australia—as a butler. It is even possible that his narratives were founded on a certain amount of fact, to the extent that he had done some exploration. His motive was purely to make money at a time when he was in need.

DR FREDERICK COOK'S hoax in 1908, when he was hailed as the discoverer of the North Pole, had all the elements necessary for success. It was topical—the conquest of the North Pole was very much in the news. It was possible—after many decades of exploration, success was felt to be near. He produced a convincing narrative and such material evidence as is possible in such cases. He was fairly quickly discredited, and his fall was as rapid as his rise. It was widely believed that he had covered the last 500 miles to the Pole only in his dreams. But there were some who retained faith in him, including the great Amundsen. Cook was later convicted of fraud and sentenced to prison. Amundsen visited him in prison and said: 'I don't know whether he deserves to be there; but I do know that he is a genius and, in the matter of Arctic exploration, no faker.'

THE field of psychic research offers obvious and unlimited scope for the hoaxer. But once the study of psychic phenomena was taken up in an objective and genuinely scientific spirit by scientists with the necessary technical knowledge it was difficult for a hoax to survive serious investigation. Whatever the motive for the deception, and the motives in this particular field may be extremely mixed, the deception could have but little chance of surviving tests under scientific conditions by sceptics.

A remarkable hoax perpetrated in the 'eighties concerned thought transference between two men who, apparently, had nothing to gain. They were given tests by the leading scientific investigators of the day, and passed them. Thirty years later one of the men published a 'Confession', in which he stated that the 'telepathy' was carried out by means of an elaborate code. The hoax started in a small way and grew bigger than intended, like many clever hoaxes getting out of hand. The man pointed out what were alleged inaccuracies in the reports of the investigators, drawing attention to the fact that even trained observers could make serious mistakes. Here again it is right to add that the other man concerned denied the confession, maintaining that the telepathy was perfectly genuine.

At one time gold- and diamond-making in the laboratory was a favoured basis for hoaxes, which, in some cases, deceived experts. The motive here was generally that of gain—it was simply the confidence trick in scientific and topical context. But in at least one instance between the wars the 'gold-maker' was a scientist of some ability, impressed other scientists, and probably deceived himself just as effectively as he did his investors. In any case, he was apparently as genuinely surprised as they were when the gold failed to materialise according to plan!

THE increasing variety and delicacy of scientific tools of all kinds makes the scientific hoax more difficult to carry off successfully, at any rate for more than a short time. The true scientist, of course, very rarely attempts a hoax, and the layman cannot have the expert knowledge necessary for success with any but the crudest deception. Nevertheless, we should not overlook the fact

AN UNORTHODOX GUIDE TO STRANGE LIQUEURS

that the more delicate and exact the tests, the more surely the hoaxter may hook his fish if he can devise a way of passing them. In the long run a robust scepticism and simple common-sense may be better protection

against being hoaxed than expert knowledge. On the other hand, it was this scepticism and common-sense that led millions to refuse to believe that the Wright brothers' claim to have flown was anything but a hoax!

An Unorthodox Guide to Strange Liqueurs

TUDOR EDWARDS

IT is pleasant to reflect that the blessed mixture of sugar with alcohol was invented to warm the old age of Louis Quatorze. If someone says that liqueurs were largely evolved in 15th-century Italy, we will agree not to split hairs, and we will then proceed to make confusion worse confounded by indicating the alcoholic state of the Netherlands in the 17th century. To-day, Nicolaas Kroese, the genial and discriminating host of several Amsterdam restaurants, has revived some of these old liqueurs, and in his Rembrandt Tavern you can sample some—not all, unless you wish to sprawl full-length beside the Heerengracht. What a catalogue of intrigue and imagination, what adventures for the palate—Jack in the Cellar, Bride's Tears, Eau de Ma Tante, Consolation in Bitter Suffering, Midwife's Aniseed, Quarter to Five, Rose without Thorns, Venus Oil, Forget-me-not, Pull up Your Shirt, Damsel in Green, Silverwater, etc. What is virtually a liqueur, internationally known as Half and Half, is served in the Amsterdam gin-shop of Wynand Fockink, with its array of ancient bottles filled with different gins. This is, of course, the country responsible for Curaçoa.

North of Holland there is little in the way of liqueurs. There is the Gold Wasser of Danzig and the Akvavit of Sweden, largely distilled from a spirit prepared from sawdust, though these are strictly no more liqueurs than

is the Russian Vodka. In Denmark, in addition to the celebrated Herring Cherry Brandy, there is the C.L.O.C. family of liqueurs made by the distilleries which produce all Denmark's schnapps. The Danish Solbaer Rom (blackcurrant rum) is hardly a liqueur.

On the home front the bleak desert where liqueurs bloometh not is relieved by a single oasis in the form of Drambuie, originally made from a Skye recipe reputedly handed down from Bonnie Prince Charlie himself, and compounded of heather honey, herbs, essences, and spices and based on the oldest malt whiskies. It is said that in remote parts of Wales people still concoct a liqueur from local birch-sap, and perhaps this is a secret well guarded from the Sassenach.

WE return, inevitably, to France, where early last century the best Paris restaurants served as many as thirty different French liqueurs. What has happened to Liqueur des îles and Noyau de Martinique? Yet there must be in the whole of France nearer ten times thirty liqueurs if we include the rare spirits and the ratafias or alcoholic fruit cordials. The excitements of Alsace—Quetsche, Mirabelle, Kirsch, and others—are well known, but let us look at some of those which never appear on a *carte des vins*.

In the île de France there is Crème de

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Noyaux de Poissy, a sweet strong liqueur made of fruit-stones and brandy. In Flanders there is Ratafia de Genièvre, made from the gin special to the north of France. From the mountains of the Jura comes a liqueur made from gentians, and another, Epicéa, a yellow liqueur made of buds of the fir-tree with brandy. The Lyonnais has Eau de Noix, a liqueur from green walnuts. Riquiqui, a ratafia of grapes, comes from Périgord. Hypocras, an old liqueur of sugared wine simmered with cinnamon, is still made in several parts of France. In Corsica there is the aqua vita or brandy distilled from pressed grapes and flavoured with myrtle. While from the scented mountains of Dauphiné come Génépi des Alpes, made of Alpine wormwood and brandy, China-China, a sweet liqueur from wild cherries, Arquebuse, from Alpine plants, and yet another made from camomile.

The classic Chartreuse comes, of course, from these same Dauphine mountains, where it is made by a handful of white-habited Carthusian monks, who, standing beside the giant stills and retorts of the distillery and the 12,000-litre casks of the cellars, resemble the alchemists of some old engraving. There are said to be 130 ingredients, including carnations, absinthium, and the young buds of pine-trees, but there are only two copies of the exact recipe in existence—one in the possession of the Father-General of the Order, and the other, sealed, deposited in a bank. Benedictine is, or was, another monastic liqueur, and, though it is now in secular hands, the 400-year-old recipe of Dom Bernardo Vincelli is still used.

There are, however, less-known monastic liqueurs, chief of which are Trappistin, Aiguebelle, and Sénancole, all made by Trappist monks of the south. I have sampled Aiguebelle at the great monastery of that name, as I have sampled Sénancole in the remote hermitage-like abbey of Sénanque in the mountains of Provence. Indeed, I used to help my friend Roger of Sénanque, now a monk of Lérins, to stack the bottles in the little office of the monastery when I was staying there. And a tempting phalanx of bottles it was, all precious elixirs of a pale-jade colour, resembling both Chartreuse and Aiguebelle in taste and bouquet. It is perhaps a simple step from making liqueurs to making perfumes and vice versa, and the monks of the romantic Abbaye d'Hautecombe on the shores of Lac du Bourget in Savoy make and sell little bottles

of cyclamen and lavender labelled with the abbey crest.

MONKS know a thing or two about liqueurs, and I have sampled them as far afield as the abbey of Ettal near Oberammergau in Bavaria. Brewing privileges were formerly granted to many German monasteries, and there are several such breweries, now in secular hands, which furnish a good 'cloister brew'. Equally famous are the 'cloister specialities' of Frauenworth and the 'stomach bitters' of Regensburg. Two great Belgian abbeys, Orval and Westmalle, still brew excellent beer—but that is another story.

Italy is also classic ground for monastic liqueurs, though they are an acquired taste. It is pleasant to sit in monastery *spezierie* or pharmacies, or with an introduction worm one's way into the parlour. The Trappists of Tre Fontane outside Rome make a liqueur called Eucalyptine, and they also produce an 'Aromatic Vinegar' and a tonic wine, Kinol Trap, made from eucalyptus and old Marsala wine. One unkind critic observed that it was difficult to know which was which. The Trappists of Casamari and Fossanova also distil distinctive liqueurs. The monks of Monte Senario above Florence make a liqueur called Gemma d'Abeto from local pines. In Florence itself is to be found a liqueur made from orris-root. Few Italian liqueurs appeal to our pampered, or perhaps untutored, palates, and to us they may resemble a devilish compound of varnish, cough-mixture, and methylated spirit. Grappa is a strong dry liqueur, literally the stuff they give the troops. The Neapolitan Strega is perhaps the most acceptable, even if it does taste like a mouthful of pine-needles.

And so on to the Slavonic Slivowitz, the fiery Tsikoudia of Crete, the Raki of Greece, and the Rumanian Tuica (pronounced as if spelt Suica), a scented plum-brandy served iced in small thin-necked bottles rather like Roman tear-glasses.

Most of the foregoing are unobtainable in this country, but some at least can be ordered through intrepid wine-merchants. The rest you can pick up on your travels. Throwing a liqueur party is the kind of thing they did in the 'nineties. You could try it sometime. It might make you the most popular fellow in the club—or, of course, it might get you thrown out.



Last-Minute Guest

CATHERINE GAYTON

MRS FAIRBURN awoke on the day of her dinner-party with that disagreeable sensation of something uncoiling like a snake in her mind, ready to raise its ugly head the moment she lifted hers from the pillow.

She half sat up, then sank back amongst her peach-coloured bedclothes with a sigh. What was it? Oh yes, so tiresome at the last moment like this. Gloria, and Ellis, and her niece Pam. Three of the guests. No, two of them. *No, one.*

Mrs Fairburn, facing the snake determinedly, for she was not a woman to be easily intimidated, sat up again, drew on her quilted satin bed-jacket, and rang for her breakfast.

When the tray came, she toyed with the grapefruit, but left the toast untouched. She opened her letters and glanced through the papers, keeping the snake deliberately at bay, as she averted her eyes deliberately from the telephone, which must be the medium of the delicate task which awaited her.

If only it would ring and Gloria's voice float soothingly into her ear, proclaiming a: 'Darling, it's all right about this evening.' But the innocent-looking ivory instrument remained cruelly silent, and Gloria was undoubtedly still asleep and dreaming of goodness knew what. Diamonds, probably, and

yachts. A selfish, frivolous creature, but if one gave parties, one had to have guests, and gay, giddy Gloria, with her gorgeous gowns, was certainly an asset.

Mrs Fairburn had a busy morning before her—a facial, a manicure, and her hair. She was a punctual person and had no intention of being late for these essential appointments. She had ordered her car for half-past ten, and it was now just after nine. That gave her, if she hurried a little over her dressing and had only a brief word with her cook and butler—thank goodness she was an excellent organiser and the framework of the dinner was firmly in place—that gave her ample time for putting to rights this unfortunate hitch in the proceedings.

But who on earth could she ask? One had to be so very careful about a last-minute invitation like this. It was a matter really requiring the utmost tact, for people were apt to be touchy if begged in desperation to come at such short notice. Not very flattering to be a fill-in! Also, it placed the hostess in a humiliating position, for the last-minute guest, who in any case was probably someone whom she didn't want at all, gained a sort of ascendancy over her, not unlike a blackmailer getting his way. 'Righto, don't worry—I'll oblige,' and then plonking down at table and

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gobbling up the exquisite food and wines which both you and they knew perfectly well had not been intended for them, must have been considered far too good, or else why hadn't they been invited in the first place? Horrible.

And to add to Mrs Fairburn's difficulties, there was still the possibility that, at the last moment, Gloria might come!

What a nuisance Gloria's cold was—one of that keep-you-guessing variety which had seemed yesterday, when she telephoned about it, undecided whether to develop into a stammer or to remain merely a sniffle. If a stammer, Gloria would retire early with an aspirin instead of rustling into strapless spangled tulle and gracing Mrs Fairburn's dinner-table. Merely a sniffle would save the tulle from a dreary evening in the wardrobe and Gloria from a poached egg in bed. But the annoying part of it was that dear Gloria was not to be telephoned to this morning. Her hours were nothing if not erratic, and she hated messages. She had left it with an airy: 'I'll let you know, darling.'

So here was poor Mrs Fairburn stranded on the horns of a dilemma. Was she to let the day go by dangling there, balancing as it were (her mind ran in metaphors this morning) on the tight-rope of Gloria's yea or nay—and it was quite possible the feather-brained dear would rush off to the races and forget all about telephoning one way or the other—or was she to fill up this gap in her party of twelve, risking the chance of Gloria sailing in, without the sign of a sniffle, as the clock chimed eight?

MRS FAIRBURN, taking her bath, and not enjoying its steaming luxury because of the cold fear trickling down her spine that she might be going to give offence, decided that at any cost she must fill the gap.

Three tables of bridge—her friends preferred bridge to canasta—required twelve people. By shifting the players around a little in case the last-minute guest was a weak hand at the game, this part of the difficulty could be ironed out smoothly enough. Well and good, though Mrs Fairburn intended keeping Ellis at her table no matter what warfare broke out amongst the other eight. If Gloria *did* sail in at the last moment, thirteen at dinner could be avoided by Williams laying a side-table for three, thus leaving even numbers at the big one. That might prove quite amusing, and the

dining-room of Mrs Fairburn's elegant flat could easily accommodate the emergency. It would cause a slight flurry, and Williams would look daggers, but it was a fence that could be taken. Mrs Fairburn began to feel that she was taking her fences pretty well.

She decided to give Gloria just fifteen more minutes. If she hadn't telephoned by then, Mrs Fairburn would get busy. She was too dignified to picture herself as 'getting cracking', but that was what it amounted to.

The fifteen minutes ticked by—the smooth morning-workings of her well-run home, the hum of the electric-sweeper, the quiet opening and closing of doors as Williams and the housemaid went about dusting, unchallenged by the shrill summons of the telephone.

Mrs Fairburn had not wasted one moment of the fifteen. She was now back in her bedroom, perfectly groomed and fully dressed except for her outdoor things, seated at her dainty Sheraton desk calmly looking through her list. This consisted of a large notebook in which she kept the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all her friends and acquaintances.

Her light-blue eyes travelled steadily down the pages, but, even as she read name after name, she knew this was merely a pretence she was making. A search for a last-minute guest must be limited to very intimate friends, and friends like that, who would not be offended by the invitation, could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Claire, for instance. Claire would have loved to help out, the poor darling, but she was a victim to arthritis and rarely left her house. Then there was Ethel, good-natured Ethel, who would gladly have popped into her one-and-only black lace and come up by train from the suburbs; but Ethel had had luck with investments and was cruising in the Mediterranean.

Mrs Fairburn closed the notebook. There remained the family, of course. No use blinding herself any longer to what she'd been trying not to see. One's family had to be fallen back on at times and, in this case, the choice fell quite obviously on Pam. Her niece Pam, who played bridge, who was attractive, and just nineteen.

But Ellis was another of the guests, and it was on account of Ellis that Mrs Fairburn had most particularly *not* invited Pam—Pam, who was attractive and just nineteen.

How terribly difficult entertaining could be!

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WITH a sigh, Mrs Fairburn rose and crossed to the telephone. Pam would be at her job by now, but her mother, who was Mrs Fairburn's sister-in-law, would know if the child were free this evening. Even if she had a date, Alice, Pam's mother, would be only too glad for the child to break it and go to her aunt's instead. Mrs Fairburn smiled ruefully. Not much chance of Alice refusing for Pam!

She lifted the receiver and, to her surprise, heard no dialling-tone. She waited a moment, but the telephone was dead. Just then, a knock came at her door.

"Come in."

Williams entered, looking more than usually solemn. "Excuse me, madam, but I've come to tell you that—Ah, I see you are trying to use the telephone, madam, but I'm afraid it's out of order. Mrs Williams has been trying to get the greengrocer, but the line is quite dead. I trust it can soon be put right. But we thought it best to send Ellen around to the greengrocer on account of the dinner this evening."

"Quite right, Williams. Thank you. You had better ring for a porter, and ask them to get through to the engineers from downstairs."

"I rang the lift-bell, madam, but the porters never seem to be about now, not since the lifts have been made automatic."

"Then you had better go across the landing to our neighbours and ask them to be so kind as to allow you to dial the engineers from their flat."

"Yes, madam, I'll do that at once."

Williams withdrew, and Mrs Fairburn, keeping her temper admirably, opened a door of her built-in cupboards and took out her long mink coat. She had glanced from the window and seen that the weather was behaving itself about as badly as everything else on this ill-fated morning of her dinner-party. The sky was leaden, threatening snow or sleet, and there were actually thin layers of ice in the street. Really! There must have been a sharp frost in the night, which had congealed yesterday's puddles. She adjusted her hair beneath her hat, waiting for half-past ten, when she would go downstairs to the car. How marooned one felt without the telephone! Gloria might have been trying to ring her all this time, and now she herself was unable to get through to Alice.

It was all she could do to shrug and remind herself that a dinner-party was only of minor

importance in life. She knew that, yet it was hard to keep her temper. Still, she managed it. Upsets were bad for one's looks when one was no longer all that young. Perhaps this delay in inviting her niece was a blessing in disguise. Why not think it over again? Why throw Pam and Ellis together?

Williams returned. "I've spoken to the engineers, madam, and the line will be tested at once. Our neighbours were very kind and asked me to say that you were welcome to use their phone, if the matter was urgent."

"Thank you, Williams, and it is very good of them, but I haven't time now to stop."

MRS FAIRBURN was soon relaxing under skilful hands at the beauty-parlour. Refreshed and in the best of spirits again, she decided to speak to Gloria from there, and make quite sure about her before ringing up Alice. After all, if she asked Pam, Alice would know the child was only a fill-in. Not that Alice would care!

"Oh, that's all right, Nadine!" she would have exclaimed, if Mrs Fairburn had rung her up. "Do you think I expect you to have Pam every time you give a party? It's jolly good of you to ask her now. She'll love it. A chance to wear her treasured best, the billowy apple-green organza, and she'll look a poppet, you'll see. Auntie Nadine will be as proud as paint of her niece. Thanks a million, dear. Oh, you know that tweed skirt of mine that got scorched when I was basting the Sunday joint? Well . . ."

That was the worst of Alice, or perhaps the best. One couldn't offend her. Not that one wanted to, of course, but her friendliness, her imperturbable good humour, her bubbling high spirits, could be faintly irritating at times. She and Bob, Mrs Fairburn's brother, were a happy-go-lucky pair, muddling along in an easygoing way in their old-fashioned maisonette, where one tumbled over dogs and books and children. Alice herself could be compared to a bouncing, affectionate poodle which you couldn't help liking, but which was rather a bore, because, no matter how much you ignored or snubbed it, it persisted in its liking for you, in its lively pleasure at the bits of biscuit you threw it.

Mrs Fairburn's bits of biscuit to her sister-in-law took the form of occasional kindnesses to Pam. Well, more than *occasional*. What about the coming-out party, and that cocktail-

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taffeta last summer, and the brandy-coloured velvet beret (it had cost the earth when new), and the white fur stole which had been a Christmas gift to her niece? Not that the fur was ermine or mink, nothing ridiculous like that. It wouldn't do to spoil the child, though she had turned out to be really attractive, with that honey-gold hair and creamy skin, that slim grace which lent magic to what she wore, the music in her laughter . . . Charm was so effortless at that age, and therein lay its charm. The girl might make a good match some day, given the necessary chance.

But why, Mrs Fairburn asked herself, should *she* constitute herself the Chance? No, Pam should not be invited to-night. Ellis would be there . . .

ELLIS could not be called a young-man-about-town for several reasons: (a) he was no longer all that young, being thirty; (b) he did not own a red sports car, but a somewhat ancient black saloon; and (c) he was rather shy, and seemed wholly unaware of his social assets as an agreeable bachelor. Mrs Fairburn, thinking him over after she had made his acquaintance, decided that his chief attraction lay in category (c), and that it would be a pity if he were to be drawn out of her orbit by the magnet of some young and pretty face. He was something of a novelty as eligible bachelors go. Ginger-haired and rather plump, his eyes twinkled with Pickwickian humour, and he stuttered a little, which gave Mrs Fairburn a delightful, tender feeling of wanting to mother him, especially as what he said when he got it out was worth waiting for. Ellis was clever and would obviously make his mark one day. He held a very good position with a flourishing firm of accountants.

Mrs Fairburn would have strenuously denied any ulterior thoughts in the matter, had anyone dared to suggest them. She might not have been offended, but would simply have smiled and said: 'Oh, my dear, what nonsense! I'm just a big sister to him. A woman with my advantages can be of such help to a rising man. He may get into Parliament one day. But as for what you're hinting at—no, never. Dear Wilfred . . .' and she would have clasped her hands in her lap and sighed, murmuring about her determination to remain a widow.

No, the idea of marriage was plainly absurd,

but why put Ellis in the way of meeting a pretty girl if it could be prevented?

MRS FAIRBURN'S conversation with Gloria's maid was highly unsatisfactory. Gloria was out, having motored off to the country, and the maid was afraid that this sudden cold spell would do madam's chill no good. Yes, madam had complained of a sore throat and headache, but she had not mentioned about the evening. Perhaps madam meant to wait and see how she would be feeling by then. No, she had not left any message.

Feeling altogether finished with Gloria, Mrs Fairburn rang off and went to her hair-dresser's. There, under the drier, she had her inspiration. *Alice!* Why not ask Alice herself instead of Pam? Bob wouldn't mind being left at home for once.

Mrs Fairburn drove to her club, where she had to attend a committee meeting during the afternoon, and, meeting some friends in the hall, went straight into the dining-room to lunch with them. It was a great relief to have thought of Alice, and no need to hurry about ringing her up. Alice, tied by family cooking, was practically always free of an evening. And she'd frankly enjoy the excellent dinner, poor dear.

Mrs Fairburn enjoyed her lunch, lingering over coffee and cigarettes. Then she went to the telephone.

The twins answered, and told her that Mummy was out. Would Auntie Nadine like them to ask Mummy to telephone her when she came in?

Mrs Fairburn hesitated, remembering that her own line had been out of order, though it was probably repaired by now. The twins would be sure to muddle it if she told them to ask their mother to phone the club. She could tell from strange noises coming over the wire that they were scuffling now for possession of the receiver. Really, Alice should forbid them to touch the phone, though when she was out and no one else at home, how could it be helped? 'When will Mummy be in?' she asked, aware of a sudden sense of weariness over the whole affair. For two pins she'd go home and to bed and let the dinner go hang.

'At tea-time. It's our half-term, and she's baked some super scones and a pink iced-cake with chocolate blobs on it. The blobs have all run together, but—Oh, good-bye, Auntie.'

When tea-time came, Mrs Fairburn felt like

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tackling the problem again. The committee meeting had passed very well, and it was only four o'clock. Why not drive to Alice's, have a cup of tea there, and by asking her in a really nice way, with the due amount of apology and coaxing—"You see, dear, I came all this way just to *beg* you to be a real pet and help me out, and I'll send the car for you"—make it quite impossible for Alice to suggest Pam instead as she didn't want to leave poor Bob all on his ownsome.

THE maisonette was situated in a mid-Victorian square, and had the advantage of roominess, though the whole neighbourhood now wore a faintly neglected air. The trees were Hans Andersen fairy-tales this afternoon, delicately powdered from a recent flurry of snow. It was a quiet spot, tucked behind the main streams of traffic, and Mrs Fairburn was just noticing patches of ice in the roadway, which would have been churned up by now in a more frequented thoroughfare, when it happened. One moment her car was moving smoothly forward, the next something had borne down upon them, seeming to swallow her up in darkness . . .

That evening, still feeling weak and a little shaken, but no longer sick and faint, she raised her head from unfamiliar pillows. 'I believe I've been asleep,' she said.

'You have, my dear,' replied Alice, bending over her with a smile. 'You've had a nice rest, and now I'm going to get you something to eat. The doctor thought some hot soup and a slice of toast. How does your head feel now? You'll be as right as rain in a day or two, if you'll just lie quietly and let us take care of you. Oh, nonsense, dear, that's rubbish! It's no trouble. You'd do the same for me, if a beast of a van came skidding broadside into my car right in front of your door. That's what happened, and your chauffeur wasn't to blame at all. He couldn't possibly have swerved in time, but the impact threw you violently forward. Yes, Pam's been on the phone to Williams, and he's put off your guests, and Mrs Williams has come with everything you'll need. Let me plump up your pillows. That's right. Now you shall have some supper.'

MRS FAIRBURN'S head ached a little, but otherwise she felt perfectly comfortable,

and strangely glad to have Alice about her. It was soothing to know that she could stay here, just while she felt weak like this, and not have to be by herself in her own flat. One's family was a stand-by, something to depend on when one needed help. Hadn't she come here to beg Alice to help her out to-night? Yes, Alice, not Pam . . .

But when Alice came back with a dainty tray, the sight of which made Mrs Fairburn realise that she felt quite ready for some food, she said: 'My poor dinner-party, Alice! Isn't it a pity? It was going to be such a lovely one, and I'd come here at the last minute to—er—to beg Pam to be a perfect pet and fill-in for me.'

'And why not?' said Alice. 'Fill-ins often have a jolly good time, all the better for being unexpected. Well, never mind, Nadine, *you* are *our* last-minute guest this evening and very welcome—only, I'm so sorry you can't join the party!'

'Party?'

'Yes. Pam would have loved to help you out to-night if she could, but she's got a few friends in herself. I'm worried stiff that the noise may be disturbing you. Can you hear the radiogram? They're dancing now in the big basement room. I chased them down there from the drawing-room, which is just beneath here, because I was so afraid of the racket they're making. If it disturbs you, I'll pop right down and put a stop to it. They can play canasta instead.'

'Please don't dream of doing that, Alice. One doesn't hear a thing up here.'

'That's the best of these solid old houses. Oh, shall I tell the young man that you like his flowers? I don't think you've noticed them yet. How forgetful of me! There, on the dressing-table. Aren't they lovely? I must say I do like it when a young man shows thoughtfulness. When he heard you'd had an accident and the dinner was off, he took the trouble to come along here with flowers. I thought it was the least I could do to ask him in . . . this wretched snowy night, knowing he must be at a loose end, and he seemed really grateful. The shy type, isn't he? But young people soon put each other at ease.'

Mrs Fairburn closed her eyes, and bowed silently to the inevitable. Young people soon put each other at ease . . . Dancing in the basement to the radiogram . . . Yes, of course, such things were inevitable. She opened her eyes again and smiled at Alice. 'You mean a

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plumpish young man with ginger hair, don't you?"

'That's him. Stammers a bit, but he's a good dancer, and so is Pam. When I was in the kitchen just now and took a peep at the party, they were still dancing together. They've been partners most of the evening.'

She came to the bedside and removed the tray. 'I'm so glad you enjoyed the soup. Now, laugh if you like, Nadine, because I admit I'm a goose to go floating away on rosy dreams like this, but mothers all do it, so—maybe this Ellis is the man for Pam, who knows? I think they've taken to each other. I've always thought an older man would suit

Pam, because she's not only pretty but intelligent, and I believe Ellis has found that out already. When I passed them on the kitchen-stairs they were arguing fiercely about their favourite authors and arranging to go out together this week-end. Well, if anything comes of it, it'll be thanks to you, for you'd have had them meet in any case.'

Mrs Fairburn leaned back against her pillows. She cleared her throat, then began to say bravely: 'As a matter of fact, Alice, I'd meant to ask *you* this evening.' But it seemed rather pointless now and, in any case, Alice, busily folding things away in a drawer, wasn't listening.

Soothing the Savage Breast

Animals and Music

JAMES SEDDON

'WHAT passion cannot music raise and quell?' asked Dryden. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the poet was thinking only of man when he wrote his famous line. Animals, too, have their musical moments, and Dryden may well have been referring to that lesser-known bypath of science devoted to studying the influence of music on the beasts of the field. Do cats and dogs, to say nothing of seals and elephants, truly respond to music? Can they distinguish between Chopin and mere noise, or is all this talk about musically-minded creatures so much anthropomorphism, as zoologists say when they complain at the way in which people persist in attributing human feelings to animals?

If the question is debatable, it is not for lack of evidence. For centuries old sailors have been yearning about the seals that follow a ship for miles when music is being played on deck. Equally renowned is the landsman's story of

wolves gathering around his evening campfire lured by the strains of his violin. Such tales are as old as Orpheus with his lute. The ancients are said to have drawn crabs from beneath stones and to have coaxed bees back to the hive with the clashing of cymbals. For years one of the pleasanter legends of the Bastille concerned an officer who obtained permission to play the lute in his cell. The first notes drew forth an audience of appreciative mice of such dimensions that it was two days before he dared play again. Fortunately he was able to dispose of his unwelcome listeners by borrowing a cat and letting it loose at the opportune moment.

In more recent times Shackleton, the explorer, carried out some private research in the Antarctic when he took a gramophone and set it up in the snow to entertain the penguins. They flocked around in hundreds, listening attentively, until he played 'Waltz me around, Willie', when they waddled off, squawking

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disgustedly. Captain Scott confirmed Shackleton's report, saying that penguins would always appear whenever anyone began singing. Quite recently a French veterinary surgeon claimed that horses and donkeys can be cured more rapidly if soothing music is played to them, and that music also has the power to make horses work harder and cows produce more milk.

Yet another example of the fascination of music for wild creatures can be found in *The Book of a Naturalist*, where W. H. Hudson recounts a tale told to him by an Anglo-Argentine friend in Buenos Aires. This man owned a ranch on the western frontier and used to while away the long winter evenings practising the flute. One evening while he was playing he heard a sound as if someone were pressing heavily against the door. He continued playing, but listened carefully, and at length heard the door creak. He rose stealthily, crept to the door, and with a sudden movement jerked it open. To his amazement, a large dog-fox tumbled headlong at his feet. It had been standing up on its hind-legs, one ear at the keyhole, listening to the sounds of the flute.

IT is among the owners of domestic animals, however, that there exists the strongest conviction of the innate musicality of creatures other than man. Dame Ethel Smyth in her memoirs describes how her mongrel St Bernard, Marco, 'used to lie entranced, his head on the pedals of a seldom silent piano'. Thomas Hardy and Clara Butt also claimed that their pet dogs had an ear for music. Walter Savage Landor had no doubts on the matter. In a letter he describes how he took Pomero, his Pomeranian, to hear the famous Luisina de Sodre play and sing. 'Pomero was deeply affected,' he wrote, 'and lay close to the pedals on her gown, singing in a good variety of tones not always in time. It is unfortunate that he will always take part when there is music, for he sings even worse than I do.'

It has been suggested that the enchantment that music seems to exercise upon certain dogs is linked up with their aural sense, which is extremely acute. Pavlov discovered that when he had trained a dog to associate the bringing of food with the sound of middle C struck on a tuning-fork the creature would not so much as lift an eyelash if he sounded, not merely C

sharp or B natural (a half-tone higher or lower), but any of four notes *between* middle C and the higher or lower half-tone. These notes are indistinguishable to most human beings, including trained musicians.

Moreover, the experiments of Engelmann and Katz have proved that a dog's aural range is over three times greater than that of man and extends well into the supersonic region. Few human beings can hear sounds beating at a frequency of over 30,000 vibrations a second; a dog can pick them up at nearly 100,000 vibrations a second.

Such facts would seem to suggest that it is the richness of musical sound-waves that attracts the creatures rather than melody, for it is doubtful whether a dog could link together the notes of a tune to make recognisable musical sense—a faculty not highly developed by tone-deaf human beings. Much of the richness of musical sounds is due to the presence of overtones, or harmonics, ghostly echoes which are generated by each musical note and which trail off into inaudibility. Unquestionably a dog can pick out far more of these echoes than a man; yet there is no evidence that dogs prefer the music of Chopin and Debussy, two composers who exploited the effect of harmonics with great skill in their piano compositions. Musical dogs seem to listen to anything and everything, though they often have unaccountable dislikes, tunes that set them howling with their noses in the air, a reaction that has been observed among wolves, jackals, and other members of the canine tribe.

WHAT has been said about dogs might also apply to cats, creatures with equally sensitive ears, though as their mistresses would say, possessing superior musical taste. There are as many tales of musical cats as of musical dogs, including that of the solemn creature which always came and sat on a chair to listen to her mistress doing her two hours' daily practice, and the one about the famous Persian who not only stretched out on the top of the grand-piano purring with delight whenever anyone touched the keys, but was also often to be found in the empty music-room, seated in the open top of the instrument, gently twanging the strings with her claws.

But the queen of all musical cats was undoubtedly that owned by Théophile Gautier, the French poet. According to him, this cat

not only listened intently, but had all the makings of a first-class music critic as well. 'Seated on a pile of scores,' he relates in his memoirs, 'she would listen attentively and with evident pleasure to the ladies who came to our house to sing. But shrill notes made her nervous, and when the high A occurred she never failed to shut the mouth of the singer with her paw.'

IT was in the hope of throwing some light on this vexed question of music and the beast that an animal psychologist obtained permission, some years ago, to take an 'orchestra'—two violins, flute, oboe, and mouth-organ—round the cages of the London Zoo to discover how the inmates would react to an impromptu serenade.

At first the results were disappointing. The lions and tigers majestically ignored the music, the jackals and wolves combined forces to howl it down, and the rhinoceros tried to charge the players through the bars. All the reptiles seemed uninterested, except the crocodiles and alligators, who came out of their customary somnolence for a few minutes to see what all the noise was about, and then disappeared again. The monkeys appeared more curious about the instruments than about the music, though one chimpanzee did a little dance for the players' benefit.

The cheetahs and pumas were more responsive, purring softly to the strains of 'Home, Sweet Home'. But they disliked a

tune played pizzicato on the violin and growled their displeasure at jazz. In fact, none of the creatures would tolerate strongly rhythmic music, not even the seals and sea-lions, by far the most appreciative audience. They rose out of the water at the first sounds of music with eyes closed and heads sunk on their breasts as if enraptured. Was there, then, some truth in the old salt's yarn about seals that will follow a ship when music is being played on deck? Strangely enough, in any case, at Hunstanton recently, when a new electric-organ was installed on the sea-front, it was observed that there was a marked increase in the number of seals that, as is their custom, flocked on the beach, especially opposite the spot where the new organ was erected.

But unfortunately for science the great question was never answered, for, just at the point where the Zoo experiment looked promising, it was brought to an untimely end. Those responsible were the elephants, of which great things had been expected, since they are often trained in circuses to respond to musical cues and in the East are known to appreciate the low crooning songs of their mahouts. While the orchestra was playing a dreamy waltz, one pachyderm quietly filled his trunk with water and without any warning sprayed the entire orchestra, causing their immediate retirement—an exit the ignominy of which was not lessened by the hilarity of the watching keepers, especially when one of them was overheard to mutter something about the high degree of intelligence of his charges.

Memory's Birds

*Softly evening shadows fall;
Silently, one by one,
Memory's birds come winging home,
Birds of the day that is done.*

*Birds of sorrow and birds of joy,
Birds of loss and gain,
Crowding into the dreams of night,
Haunting the weary brain.*

*With the silver dawn's returning,
Quietly they fly away,
Birds of sorrow and loss and gain—
Birds of joy will stay.*

ANN RAMSDAILE.

Grock's Farewell

LIONEL HALE

THE true believer hopes, before he dies, to see Mecca: the true lover of comedy, the *aficionado* of clowns, may be forgiven for having wanted to see Grock. In 1954 I read that Grock was to give his farewell performance in Hamburg. The great man—*Der Koenig der Clowns* was his flaring title on his posters—had decided to retire. And I had never seen him! It was necessary to make all arrangements at once to go to Hamburg, like a true-believing pilgrim hastily hitching on to the last caravan to Mecca.

For many years Dr Adrian Wettach, the Swiss-born Doctor of Literature of Budapest University, *honoris causa*, better and more briefly known as the clown Grock, had been a legend. His circus had been trailing round Europe, but he had not been seen in England since 1925. Great men have their foibles; and it is fairly well understood in the circus world that the peasant-born Grock wears his purse close to his heart. The Coliseum was in 1925 London's greatest music-hall, or vaudeville theatre, and it was run by that frosty martinet Oswald Stoll. Grock had been the Coliseum's resident comedian for nearly five years. One afternoon he asked for a rise in salary. Stoll, in an even more angular Anglo-Saxon attitude than usual, refused. He added, as his personal opinion, that Grock—who had admittedly failed in the U.S.A.—would be a success nowhere but in London. This combination of affront to his pride and injury to his pocket brought out the William Tell in the clown from Switzerland. He said a rude word, in the dialogue of a canton unknown to Oswald Stoll.

That evening, the famous Coliseum globe of electric-lights revolved as usual over London. The lights on the façade still spelled 'G . . R . . O . . C . . K'. But, while the audience waited, Grock was halfway across the Channel, never to return. He left with bag

and baggage. His properties filled only one trunk—a tiny violin, a pair of white cotton gloves, a bald salmon-pink wig, a little felt hat, a reckless parody of a dress-suit, a pair of long flapping boots, a cigar-box full of grease-paints. These were his properties—and, of course, illimitable greatness.

He never returned. The Income Tax collectors, holding in their hands a claim for £4000, were waiting for him, with the courteous and patient melancholy of bloodhounds. London theatre-managers, imploring him to return, offered to discharge his income tax twice, three times, four times over. Grock remained on the Continent of Europe, disdaining the pound sterling, among the francs and pesetas and deutschmarks and kronen and lire.

So one had to go to Hamburg. Here, on 31st October 1954, Grock was to say good-bye to the circus, to the tented laughter, to the music, to the lights, and to the enveloping thunders of applause. There, by the dark waters of the Elbe, the caravans of the Grock circus rested for the last time. Round the tent, grouped in laager, redder than reality under the arc-lamps, stood the caravans in a circle; and in his own large caravan lay, resting for the evening, attended by wife and nurse, the clown Grock, seventy-four years old, looking back over sixty-one years on the road and listening to the silvery music of the good German marks at the turnstiles.

Of course, one went there wholly expectant, but with a strong tinge of fear in the expectancy. For years those who knew Grock's act had been describing it. The talk of other clowns had always come round again circuitously, often by way of Chaplin, to Grock. Fat men, and respectable company directors at that, would describe him over the

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dinner-table at length. And now he was old, and still, one was rightly told, going through the same repertoire of tricks. 'Superfluous,' one gloomily quoted Samuel Johnson to oneself, 'lags the vet'ran on the stage.' True, Grock was a legend; but it is kittle work verifying a legend . . . I sat there in the circus-tent at Hamburg, watching the early turns of jugglers and trampolinists and trick-cyclists and acrobats, waiting for Grock: and afraid for him: and afraid for the legend: and afraid for my illusions.

And . . . ? And . . . ? Briefly, then, in his final night at Hamburg, at the age of seventy-four, after God alone knows how many repetitions of his act, when his little violin ought to have been worn to a paper-thickness, and he himself diminished by long use to a shadow, Grock did all that they had told me he did, and Grock was all that they had told me he was. *Der Koenig der Clowns*, the King of the Clowns, indeed.

This act of his, only one in a thousand of successive European acts, is a musical performance—a pastiche, a parody of musicians. Grock is a musician, and a good one, just as he is a good linguist: like Sir Andrew Aguecheek, 'he plays o' the viol-de-gamboys, and speaks three or four languages word for word without book, and hath all the good gifts of nature.'

Indeed, it is principally because he is so sensitive a musician, his circus people told me, that he has now retired. The evils of age have fallen on his fingers, and they have grown gnarled inside his white cotton gloves. He cannot any longer be sure of the right notes on the piano; and his ear cannot abide a discord, nor can his musicianly pride. This, I think, I understood before they told me, when I watched him at the piano. Suddenly, for a moment, the clown's mask fell away; and underneath it was the face of an old man, worried and concentrating on the notes, the face of an old Swiss watchmaker peering myopically into the works of a watch, the face of Adrian Wettach looking out from behind the painted face of the clown. He had to retire, being a musician.

ALL clownery, we can suppose, is essentially a comment—a satire on the dignities and even on the decencies of life, a burlesque of man's pretensions. Grock's partner, Alfred Schatz, appears in the full dignity of white tie

and tails, and admirably maintains the air of a concert performer. To him, accompanied by gales of laughter, comes Grock, a figure of a tailor's nightmare. On his head, a grey skull-cap: beneath it, the clown's face with its long pink-white chin, and its violet mouth, and its arched eyebrows, the Grock's 'pig's-snout', as he calls it: and below the shoulders the most abominable burlesque of a dress-suit. It billows about him like a balloon which a high wind has dismembered. It is secured, precariously, across his disreputable bosom by a vast safety-pin, a contrivance of which he is, you understand, vainglorious. 'Nicht hübsch,' says Schatz, his partner, regarding this safety-pin censoriously. 'Not smart.' 'Nein,' replies Grock, with a leer. 'Nein, aber praktisch!' 'No. No, but practical!' This dress-suit, in its grey-black folds, suggests an elephant, as do Grock's own great flapping feet. And so do his eyes, little eyes, elephant's eyes, eyes peering out from the wrinkles of an elephant's skin, eyes which, like an elephant's, are immemorially wise and eternally mischievous at once.

The act Grock performed in Hamburg for that last time was the act he had been performing for at any rate the twenty years his partner Schatz had been with him. Schatz told me that it had hardly varied by one movement, but that every night for twenty years, in infinitesimal touches of timing, it had been different. 'I have watched him like a lynx these twenty years,' said Schatz, 'to catch those subtleties, fresh every night.' The act is a mosaic of individual grotesqueries, a patch-work of little jests. He had been performing them year after year, country after country, and knew how.

He was still, that October, performing his celebrated leap, playing a concertina, from inside the kitchen-chair through whose seat he has fallen, a leap that lands him seated on the chair-back, his knees crossed, still playing his little tune. He still looked in perplexity at his piano-stool, left some yards away from the piano, and solved the problem by pushing the piano over to the piano-stool, the mountain to Mahomed. He still tuned his violin by the simple procedure of blowing up a toy balloon and letting the air escape, and it still gave a perfect E. He still took off his disreputable white gloves to play the piano, and was delighted to find that, if he rolled them into a ball, he could juggle with them, forgetting the piano altogether. He still varied a grovelling

GROCK'S FAREWELL

humility towards his elegant partner with sudden wild, berserk, drunken-peasant assaults on him. He still was innocently gross at scratching himself intimately with the violin-bow, his 'pig's-snout' face wearing the blissful satisfaction of a porker in a sty. The only trick left out, the one concession to the age of seventy-four, was in the matter of the piano-lid. Till a year or two ago, he would slide his hat down the lid and then—struck before our eyes by the happy thought—clamber up and follow the hat, sliding down on his rump, like a small boy on the banisters. This, to his regret, Grock had abandoned. But how he mimed the temptation to do it! How he mopped and mowed at the piano-lid, how nearly he succumbed to its fatal fascination, and how sorrowfully he tore himself away from it at last, a Pantaloons trying to cultivate philosophy! Thus he turned even the handicap of age to the account of clownery.

IT was naïve to try to find in Grock's art the creation of a human character, even one with such wide terms as Chaplin's 'Little Man'. Grock played Grock. He played, that is to say, the part of the European Clown. This is the traditional role, as it was known to Antonin, and to Bebe and Serillo, and the Brothers This or the Brothers That, and innumerable others. The stage character they all have played is itself a stage character—the painted Clown repaying the buffets of the world by a burlesque of the world. He is the Clown: and you must see in him the fatigue of the long dusty roads, and the hunger, and the broken boots, and hours of making-up in little tents by the light of a candle stub, with the rain beating on the canvas. This is the part the Clown plays; and little Adrian Wettach played it for enough years in real life, round and about the little towns and villages of Europe, before the riches came. Each Clown renews the part before the public, in his own individually-created Clown image. Grock's version was the long pink-white chin, the violet lips, the reddened ears, his elongated 'pig's-snout'. The image he drew was his own, but it never departed from basic Clown. All good circus drolls do the same: they draw Clown, according to their own whim, in grease-paints. They are all variations on a theme by Leichner.

What distinguished Grock, as it distinguishes all masters of the arts, was the simple

fact of being both born and self-made an artist. A craftsman could be as good a musical executant as Grock on the violin or the piano—if he were a very good craftsman: he could be as agile physically, dexterity from head to toe, provided that, like Grock, he had trained in his teens in such technical exercises as tight-rope walking high over the cobbles of little Swiss market-places. These accomplishments, learned as thoroughly as Grock learned them, are no more than the tools of the trade, and come to be handled with an automatically thoughtless precision. The rest is the little matter of genius.

GENIUS on show is multifarious; but in all its forms, I think, you will see the one common quality of authority. On his last night in Hamburg Grock made one assertion of it—an assertion quiet, outrageously arrogant, supremely dictatorial—and almost unnoticeable! Left alone in the circus-ring, with his audience exhausted by laughter into silence, Grock surveyed them kindly. He picked up an accordion. He began to play a little South German tune, a small plaintive nothing. And slowly, very slowly, he circumnavigated the circus-ring on the extreme edge. His head was tilted on one side, as if listening to the music: he was smiling a little at the audience as he went drowsily by. There was no sound but the little tune, and the swish-swish of his great ridiculous boots: the whole circus-tent had fallen into a deep hush. Round he went, the tune tinkling, the boots swishing, in slow time. He looked at us, and we gazed back, Grock and all of us rapt together. It was authority. It was no more and no less than an Emperor reviewing his troops, or a lion-tamer passing down the line of beasts whom he has marshalled on their pedestals, holding them with his eye. And when, at last, Grock returned to his starting-place, the audience gave one deep, unanimous, silent exhalation. As I hope to be believed, that was all that Grock did; and, as I hope for Heaven, it was the greatest feat that I ever saw a comedian perform.

The next moment, he had us rolling and rocking with laughter. Some trouble developed with his unspeakable trousers: the Emperor and the lion-tamer had disappeared in less than a flash of the eye. Jest followed jest, simplicities conveyed with the utmost subtlety and nuance of timing. Grock's

perfected art was to weld little phrases of clowning into, so to speak, long flowing passages. Thus, marching forward to give us a violin solo, he strikes an attitude. He nonchalantly spins up the bow, to catch it—only, he misses it. His eye clouds. He retires behind a screen, to practise; and you see the bow spinning up and down above the screen, until, you feel, he has the trick of it. And Grock comes out, all grin from ear to ear, strikes his attitude, spins up the bow—and misses again. He stamps his great flapping foot, and retires behind the screen, for further practice. Emerging, he is all optimism. His attitude again—the bow spins—disaster—a wild, childish cry of shame and rage. Oh, unfair, unfair! Grock bows to fate. He abandons the trick. He lifts the bow—only now the violin under his chin is upside down, and his little bewildered eyes are scanning only the bare belly three inches under his nose. Grock is a man in a nightmare, peering desperately out from behind his grease-paint, searching for violin-strings, for reason, for justice, or for the dawn to come . . . Some five crowded and catastrophic minutes later, the

violin comes the right way up. Triumphant, Grock prepares to play, and thoughtlessly spins up the violin-bow—and, without knowing it, he has caught it! He is all ecstasy; and, weak as we are by now, we rejoice with him in a thunder-crash of laughter and applause. This whole sequence of fooling, ten minutes long, has been carved in one long flowing line: it has the beauty of form.

These things had made Grock great down the years. He gave us them once again—after how many such nights?—in Hamburg on the night of 31st October 1954. At the end, flowers banked the circus-ring: the film and television cameras purred sharply: there were speeches. Grock said a few words, with his arm round the shoulders of his partner, Alfred Schatz. His voice broke, just a fraction, just the right fraction. He covered his eyes with his hand for a moment, just the right moment. He went, never to return, from the bright circus-lights into the darkness where the caravans waited, with his back at a little drooping angle—just the right little drooping angle. *'Qualis artifex pereo!'* said the whole of Grock's back, disappearing into the night.

The Rowan-Tree

*Built as men built long since, of rough grey stone,
Beside the drove-road through the hills of sheep,
A far-seen landmark stands the place, alone,
Bare to the sun-blaze and the blizzard's sweep.*

*Alone and lonely—to the passer-by,
Once the world's centre, for a hearth was here,
And this wide solitude of hill and sky
Made it, for those who called it home, more dear.*

*Nor time nor tempest should their fortress shake;
Here generations in their course should dwell,
And, planted near, a rowan-tree should make
Security against dark witchcraft's spell.*

*Now see the roofless walls, still standing, strong
Against rude weather; but the windows stare
From inward emptiness and ruin; long
Have been the rain and snow rough tenants there.*

*Good that the trustful builders cannot see
Their cherished dwelling and the jest of fate—
For here still flourishes the guardian tree
In vain, where croft and hearth are desolate.*

W. K. HOLMES.



That Night

IANTHE JERROLD

THAT night as I came through Southwark I was glad that, the Medway being in flood at Maidstone, I had been forced to take the longer road, and so came by night to London, where I had intended to arrive in daylight. For gleaming windows and inky alleyways give a strange glory, under the moon, to streets which may be drab enough by day. I said so to the fellow who had walked with me from about St George's Fields.

'Well, keep you out of these *inky*, or rather, *stinking*, alleyways,' said he, 'for there be those lurking up them who would take your life as readily as your money!'

At this I laughed, for who would seek the life of a poor harmless man like me? But my companion said sourly that I should not laugh, for there were rascals about the purlieus of the City who, their own lives being many times forfeit to the law, cared as little for the taking of a man's life as of a cat's! These men, he said, could tell a countryman from afar off, and held such green chicks to be their special prey.

Now, I had bought me a sword in Canterbury, liking its townsman's swagger, and to be called a green chick did not please me. But I said nothing, for I had cause to be thankful to this man, he having preserved me from a cunning

rogue who, as I stood in a crowd watching the mistletoe carried into St George's church, would have had my purse had not this fellow stopped him. And so, since he was for Westminster and I for London City, we fell into walking together, he discoursing, as we went, of the many great sumptuous inns we passed upon the highway, and of their charges and fine provision, and of what would take place in them this Christmas Eve; until, looking down an alley, I saw ships' masts seeming to toss lightly on the sky, and pennons lifting in a wind from which the tall roofs shut us off.

'Why, we are come to the riverside!' said I, all in a joyful wonder to have reached Thames at last. 'St Paul's lies but just across the water!'

'Why,' said my companion, with a little curl on his lower lip, which was a trick I had noticed in him, 'you are a pious countryman, then?'

'No,' I said. 'It is to make acquaintance with the printers and stationers in the Close that I go towards Paul's.'

'They will be shuttered to-night,' said he. 'No matter,' I said. 'I shall have seen them.' For I had covenanted with myself to enter Paul's Churchyard before I broke bread

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in London. 'I am a poet,' I said, 'and my living lies there.'

'A poet!' quoth he, and the moon glinted in his narrow eyes. 'There is a poet taken from the Thames three days a week, they say. As for your stationers, do not trust them, for many are seditious rogues who will put your ears in jeopardy, while others are hard-fisted men who'll not so much as look at your poems if you lack a powerful patron.'

'Yet there be poems published,' I said.

'Aye,' said he. 'More's the pity.'

WE were coming now towards London Bridge, and, looking curiously towards the gatehouse, I saw as it were a set of clubs stuck slantwise about its roof, so dark and battered-looking that one could scarce tell, except where the bright moon touched on a toadstool cheek or a hollowed socket, that these were the heads of men.

'Alas, poor souls!' I said. But my companion took me up sharply, asking if I would have traitors set free to work their wickedness through the realm, which was not my meaning, God knows. But to hear the loud joyous bells from some great church near by, and the fainter ringing of bells from churches across the river, and the loud 'Hey's!' and 'Ho's!' and jovial bustling at inn doors: and then to see those bloodless heads with pin-dot eyes, having no part in the Christian world upon which they looked, made my stomach heavy. Besides, I did not believe that all these had meant evil, but some, I thought, had erred through an excess of enthusiasm which, had events happened differently, might have appeared as noble. My companion, however, looking at me sidelong, I feared to say so, and replied only that I thought such a carrion array too barbarous to be seen at the gate of the fairest city in the world. But my friend said that, for his part, he sorrowed only to see how few heads stood there! 'You do not yet know the wickedness of this city,' he said.

And so we passed under the gate and on to the fabled roadway of London Bridge, with its fair buildings upon either side. Here and there where the houses stood a little apart, or through the windows of a house, I saw the glittering water and the bobbing movement of the lights on boats, which lent a strange enchantment to this seeming street, making it appear almost to be moving against the movement of the tide. I was impatient to come to

the drawbridge, where I could stand and view this great highway of London; and as we came there: 'Come, look!' cried my companion. 'Here is a Company's barge going towards Westminster.'

I saw a great barge moving from us, lit with torches and hung with a coloured canopy. I heard voices crying: 'Ho! Ho! Westward-ho!' and the tender splash of oars. But the barge was not all I saw. My God, there be some scenes which on the first sight make so great an impress on the soul they cannot well be spoken of, but in verse! The water appeared of a clear blackness, shivering with lights broken by the movement of the boats, so that the banksides by their mere stillness seemed to obtain a strange solemnity, as if they dreamed. I saw the north bank pricked with lights, and rising as it were in a company of fair spires towards the moon-filled sky; and below the tender spires, yet well above the river, the mighty, trunk-towered Paul's! It, too, was lit. Above the moon, where it had stood to all men's wonderment for two full months, shone the comet, the blazing star. I heard my companion telling me the names of this and that wharf or great house upon the waterside, but I was all eyes, not ears, I could not heed him. At length he said, as if offended: 'My information wearies you.'

'Your pardon,' I said. 'The comet's beauty deafened me.' For this comet, which appeared like a great star, but larger than any stars, scintillated with an extraordinary bright whiteness.

'You are in truth a poet,' he said, again with that lip-curl, 'to find beauty in what learned men think to augur the end of the world!'

At this I smiled.

'Aye, smile,' said he. 'But a comet is well known to be of evil omen, and to foretell great clashings among the nations, and the deaths of princes!'

'Well, princes be mortal,' I said.

'Aye, and I will tell you something,' he said in a low voice, 'if you come closer. The Queen's age approaches the grand climacteric, and it is well known through the Court that she is sick of a woman's weakness, and that her physicians are at their wits' end only to better her, for cured she cannot be.'

'Well, even if the Queen die,' said I, 'which God forbid, I think it will not mean the end of the world.'

Perhaps I spoke too loud, for my friend, casting his glance behind him, silenced me

THAT NIGHT

with loud empty 'Hm's' and 'Ha's' and then hurried me off to continue on our way, telling me as we went that it was unwise to speak in the street of ill-fortune to the great, no matter how loyally, since there were many spies who would not scruple to misrepresent a careless word; and he was sorry, he said, that he had set a countryman an ill example, and that I must put a strict watch upon my tongue before strangers, which I promised to do.

AND so we came into Cheapside, he still admonishing me; I silent, and with a full heart at being where I was. The goldsmiths' shops were for the most part shuttered, but the taverns were open, and round their doors a jostling of citizens, some wearing mistletoe in their hats, which they had bought from the pedlars. I would have purchased a sprig myself from a lean wench that proffered, but my friend said that her mistletoe was but a bush for other wares, and that she, seeing me a raw countryman, would follow me through the streets with lewd importunities. So I forbore.

Now we approached Paul's Close, and hearing a sound of singing, and seeing before me a narrow alley running, as I thought, into the Close, I made to enter it. But my friend cried 'Hold!' and stopped me, saying that that alley gave not on to the Close, and also that no man but a fool or a countryman would make rashly to dart down so black an alleyway. 'For thieves and robbers have no fixed stations, like your booksellers,' said he. And then, peering into the darkness of the alley, he said in a low voice, drawing me to one side: 'Now here is a lesson for you, young friend. There is one who hides in the angle of a wall there and, from his manner of looking out, I think he hath a bad purpose in his hiding. Stand here by me in the dark and watch.'

Which I did, and truly after a while I saw the pallor of a face that looked furtive-wise out from behind a wall, and then dodged back. 'You are right,' said I.

At which my friend admonished me again. 'Then learn by this, young sir, to avoid your poet's moonshine and ensue the light. Come, we will continue on the highway.'

But I, giving a last look back and seeing the movement of a long cloak, said to my friend: 'Why, it is but a woman!'

At which he, a little out of countenance, I thought, but catching me by the sleeve, said

in a scoffing whisper: 'Why, all these sturdy ruffians have their women, whom they use as lures.'

And we were departing, when, hearing a sound from up the alleyway, I halted again, and said: 'She is weeping.'

He gave a great laugh at this. 'I dare swear she has often found weeping a serviceable lure.'

'And yet,' I said, lingering, 'she may be an honest woman, wanting help.'

'You will want help if you approach her,' said he. 'For God's sake do not show yourself so green.'

'Well, I am for Paul's Churchyard,' I said, 'and if this alley lead not thither—' But such caution shamed me and, stopping still again, I said: 'Well, I thank you for your counsel, sir, but in this matter I must take counsel with myself—and I counsel myself to offer help to this woman, be she whom she may.'

'Stay, you young fool!' he cried, catching my arm; and, as I shook him off: 'I want no coroner's quest on my hands this Christmas!' As I entered between the bollards, he cried after me: 'Well, at least draw your sword, countryman.'

This seemed to me good counsel, and I went on up the alley sword in hand, and heart hammering under rib, for I must confess that my spirit was not so bold as my actions, and I greatly feared some ambush. And when I came upon a woman standing in the angle of a jutting wall, and she gave a great cry on seeing me, I cursed my folly, and stood staring foolishly for some man to answer her cry. But then I saw her blubbered face and frightened looks towards my sword, and speedily put it up, saying: 'Madam, may I be of service to you?'

I saw then that she was young and decently attired. I spoke as gently as I could, seeing her hand picking as if in terror at the fastening of her cloak.

'Oh, sir!' she tumbled forth, 'I have lost my way, and missed my husband in a great press of folk—' and so continued, in some country tongue I could not well understand, of the north, I think. But it was plain enough what her troubles were. Trying to find her way back to her lodging in Walbrook, she had met with a ruffian who had offered her insult, and fled from him up the alley: and then, seeing me and my companion at the alley's end, she had taken fright again, and hidden herself and wept and trembled, until she

now went in fear of every sound and shadow.

'Well,' I said, 'I am but a stranger and know not Walbrook, but we will find your lodging, if you will trust me.' And so I took her upon my arm, and, she still discoursing of her husband's folly in letting her be lost, and of her fear that he would be lost in looking for her, we went on down the alley by the way she had come.

'But take care, good sir,' said she, 'for he who accosted me still lurks by the corner, and he is a great ruffian, near six feet high, and he will not scruple to set about us.'

So we went carefully. And coming to the corner, I saw sprawling in a doorway a little old apple-faced drunken fellow with a wispy beard, who looked upon us genially, putting a finger unsteadily to his nose, as one who says: 'I see you.' He seemed of such build as, even sober, a maid might tumble over with a push, and I said to the woman: 'Is *this* your ruffian?'

She looked shamefast, and bit her lip, half-smiling. And, asking the way of the first fellow we met, we came soon to her lodging. Her husband had reached home before her, and was half-mad with love and fear, and so, they falling instantly into a furious dispute, I left them, and made my way back to where I had left my friend. But he, having doubtless given me up for lost, had departed, and so I

went on and entered Paul's Churchyard, and saw what I had covenanted with myself to see, the booksellers' signs hanging out from the shuttered houses.

THE western doors of the great church were open, and the congregation coming out; and those that went through the west gate I followed slowly down Ludgate Hill. As I went, I looked at the blazing star, and thought of that other star, which our learned men would have called 'comet', and of evil augur, which in good sooth proved a sign of cheer. I mean the star that drew the shepherds to the east.

Fifteen hundred and seventy-seven are many years, and have men learned no greater wisdom in all that time than to mistrust God's stars, and one another? For me, said I, the blazing star shall be a star of good, not evil, augur. And I vowed to sell my sword, from which I had had nothing but an encumbering of my walking and the frightening of a woman, and to keep the price of it against necessity. For truly, I thought, London is a great city, and it may well be that my siege of it will be longer than I think!

And so, with the moon-shadows of the citizens walking ahead of me, I came to a little inn, the Three Crows, near by the Ludgate, and I lay there that night.

The Cordoba Hat

DAVID WILLIAMS

I BOUGHT it in Sierpes, which is the name they give to the principal shopping-street of Seville. That's quite a long way from Cordoba of course, but Cordoba hats are always called so wherever you buy them, just as a Homberg is still a Homberg even when it's bought in Homerton.

In Seville the sun is an enemy, and the

house-builders and the street-makers proceed on that assumption. So Sierpes is narrow, so narrow that an average-sized man couldn't execute a cartwheel across it even supposing he felt spry enough to want to; and the sun has to have his angles absolutely right before he can probe it with his sword. Wheeled traffic is forbidden to attempt it, so you may

wander up and down and across untooted at, savouring the delights of being a townsman in one of the pre-Ford ages. In summer, when the sun is round about the zenith, so that even the cunning narrowness of Sierpes affords no protection, they stretch awnings across from the top storeys on either side. You stroll and gaze and sweat in a sort of breathless, blue-green aquarium.

The shops are small and individualistic. Seville is the birthplace of Murillo and Velásquez, but as yet has produced no Selfridge. There was plenty in the windows to attract. It wasn't very modish; nor was it laid out with the slick panache which professional window-dressers in the big shops of our Western capitals can contrive. The stuff was chunky and characterful and independent—very Spanish, in fact.

I stopped for a long time outside a grocer's. There were massive, swarthy ewe's-milk cheeses from La Mancha on show, and not a packet of cornflakes in the place. Apart from the cheeses, there was very little of what we understand by dairy produce. Pastureland is scarce in Spain and big-uddered cows something of a rarity. What the Spaniards breed are bulls. For the greasing of the human machine we look in the main to butterfat; the Spaniard depends on the olive. Its sweet-sour, stomach-turning reek is everywhere.

Further on there was a bookseller's. The proprietor was devoting his entire window to a single author—much as in a shop-window here you sometimes see a bookseller going nap on the Book of the Month choice or the latest detective story. The Spaniard's choice of author for his one-man show surprised me. It was Sir Walter Scott. The particular title selected for honour was even more surprising. Nothing from Sir Walter's splendid prime, but one of the dreary, pen-pushing products of his overworked twilight—a translation of *Peveril of the Peak*. What the Sevillanos would find compellingly interesting in this turgid tale of 17th-century Derbyshire I don't know, but presumably the bookseller knew his business.

AND then there was the shop with the Cordoba hats. There were two of them in the window, one black and one grey—no other colours seem to be permissible—each set rakishly on a gilt stand. I had seen them

and admired them before, of course—they are not at all uncommon in Andalusia—but always up till now on some Spanish head. Here they were for sale. I had only to find my size, and ninety-five pesetas, and I'd become the owner of something which, once I was back on the northern side of the channel, would steal the thunder of the curliest-brimmed bowler in Mayfair.

This doesn't mean that the Cordoba hat has anything intrinsically surprising about it. If you have a mind that can rise above fashionable trends and so enable you to view insular and peninsular conventions alike with an impartial eye, then surely the Cordoba hat is sensible almost to the point of being runcible. It's a full circle, fairly stiff. If you laid one over an outsize Victorian dinner-plate, there'd be perhaps an inch of overlap all round. The crown is shallow, the shallowness accentuated by the very wide brim, and flat-topped. You wear it tilted slightly forward. If you go on horseback—Sevillanos are great horsemen—you may loop it under your chin. A staid and suitable hat for sunny weather I told myself, and went inside.

I was a bit worried about the fit. Did Spaniards have big heads? I hoped so. In English hat-shops my practice is to ask for the largest they have and work laboriously upwards from that. I am also extravagantly brachycephalic. I cast about for some periphrasis that would convey this titbit of personal information in Spanish, but decided in the end that negotiations would gain in clarity if I described vigorous circular haloes round the top of my head with my forefinger. There was no need, as it turned out, for any anxiety. The Cordoba hat, in its pristine, unretailed state, is nothing more than a circular slice of felt. The shopkeeper, eyeing my halo-mimicry with a certain amount of apprehension, stood on a stool and proceeded to build the thing around me.

I TOOK the hat to the hotel in a large brown-paper bag. I locked the bedroom door and braced myself to turn and face the wardrobe mirror. I was not entirely reassured by what I saw. Perhaps it would be better to postpone wearing it for a while. I had, after all, my travelling companions to consider. In Cordoba, perhaps, where these splendid shapes were presumably invented, I might have the courage to come out into the open.

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In Cordoba it was hot. My resolution wilted, and I stuck, in every sense, to my Panama. I walked up and down the narrow alleyways on to which the houses turned blank, windowless faces; I peered in here and there at the tiled inner gardens with their potted shrubs and flowers, which gave an illusion, though only an illusion, of coolness. I found the cathedral. Here it was shadowy and at last the heat was kept at bay. I listened to the Christian rite murmurously unfolding itself amidst the delicate arabesques the Muslim architects had created centuries ago. Then, in a café on the main square, I drank cooling drinks which later were to play Old Harry with my evacuatory processes, and heard one of my companions remark on the stylishness of some of the hats which bobbed by along the pavement. They were masculine hats, and in each case the counterfeit presentment of the one in my brown-paper bag. Wait, I thought. Perhaps in Madrid . . .

But in Madrid it was cold, and the rain fell copiously for long spells. The Madrileños loved it. Their handsome, artificial city, spread out on its parched and arid upland, has often to wait for months between one thorough soaking and the next. They splashed about delightedly in the gurgling gutters, and all the men seemed to be wearing caps and trilbies and looked as if they were just off to see Arsenal play Wolverhampton Wanderers. It wasn't at all a suitable background for fancy-dress. Besides, I spent long hours in the Prado, a place where Goya and Greco, Velásquez and Titian, Rubens and scores more of their fraternity exercise an exclusive and splendid prerogative of conspicuously.

I LUGGED my brown-paper bag up and down the length and breadth of Spain. It was too bulky and stiff to go into my grip and, as my companions grew more and more curious, I grew more and more evasive. I suppressed it in the lovely walled town of Avila. I kept it dark in Toledo. It went with me in a bus which toiled up the northern slope of the Guadarrama and came very near to failing altogether a hundred yards from the

top of the pass. I kept it in a drawer in a hotel at San Lorenzo del Escorial while I laboured through the immensities of Philip the Second's palace with its countless small square windows staring bleakly out over the ochreous tableland of Castile. It went with me, still wrapped and still unavowed, to Irún. I declared it, sheepishly, between eleven and midnight, to a French customs official on the up platform at Hendaye. He peered at it closely in the poorish light. 'A magnificent hat,' he conceded, 'but exaggerated—like all things meridional. Me, I am from Lille.' I hurried across Paris with it next morning from Austerlitz to St Lazare. It rustled and shook in its large paper bag on the rack all the way to Dieppe. Once even—do Cordoba hats have homing instincts, I wonder?—it dropped softly on to the head of someone sitting opposite me. I marched up the gangway with it and on to the boat.

Now, I said to myself, I will wear it. I will break myself to it. I will defy augury and the giggles of schoolchildren returning from their assisted visits to Paris. On board ship people wear anything, and nobody looks twice. I found a quiet corner in the bowels of the ship, drew out my Cordoba hat, and put it on. Certainly I had never possessed a hat that fitted better. I folded the large brown-paper bag up carefully and put it in my pocket. There was Newhaven to come, a prim little port where bravado might easily falter. Then I went up quickly into the fresh air. On Channel boats I am never more than a timorous batsman on a sticky wicket, with seasickness prowling about at very silly mid-off waiting to catch me out.

I leaned over the side. The tearing breeze dipped swiftly under the brim of my Cordoba hat, which wheeled suddenly up like a great black crow, and then spiralled down into the sea. I watched it sadly for a moment, a dark water-lily greedily soaking up the English Channel, before it sank and disappeared. Then, a prey to mixed feelings, and watched entrancedly by what seemed like thousands of children, I pulled out the large folded brown-paper bag and flicked it over the side. In death as in life, I thought, the two shall not be divided.

Living Without Hands

E. GRIFFITHS

IT happened in a fraction of a second. I had taken a class of forty-seven men to the grenade practice-ground at our camp in England. The date was 26th July 1942. Forty-six of the detachment had carried out their practice. The forty-seventh was in the priming-bay getting his grenades ready. As he came over to the throwing-bay the sergeant signalled to let me know this lad was highly nervous.

After giving him the usual routine safety-precautions to observe I handed him the grenade. His hands were shaking so much that the tape was unravelling. The grenade was still in his hand, with the weighted end of the tape hanging free, pulling out the safety-pin. It was up to me to do something!

I warned the soldier to stand perfectly still and told him I was going to take the grenade from him. If I could get it . . . I could prevent the explosion by holding the pin in place with my thumb. The lad made the change-over safely, but I had time only to swing away from him, when it went off. Strangely enough, I didn't lose consciousness. I can still remember the ringing in my ears. Out of one eye I saw that both my hands were gone.

Climbing out of the throwing-bay, I instructed the men how to apply tourniquets. Then I told a truck-driver to rush me to the nearest first-aid post. It was a rough three-mile ride, part of it over a tank testing-ground.

At the post, after I had been given a sedative, I learned that my sergeant, who had rushed over to help me, had lost the sight of one eye. The lad I was instructing was killed, even though my body was between him and the explosion. By a strange freak a large fragment of the grenade had funnelled along between my chest and arm, and he had been struck just under the heart.

The morning after the accident I spent the grimmest thirty minutes I have ever experi-

enced. During the night I had been drugged to a certain extent, and was probably numb and dazed. But I awakened to a world of realities in which everything was dark. Both my eyes were bandaged. My first thought was that I had lost my sight as well as my hands. For a time I was panicky. If this were indeed the case I could envisage little for the future.

That bitter half-hour is not a period I am going to dramatise. I have always been more or less a deliberate person, liking to think things out for myself. That practice came to my rescue then. I suddenly saw my injuries for what they were—a new problem in living.

I BEGAN to take stock of my assets. I still had my legs, and my general physical condition was not serious. Very practical artificial hands were obtainable. Above all, my brain was not impaired. Given the return of my sight I had most of what any man has. By using my remaining faculties fully, and with a determination to plan my life and carry those plans through, there was no need for me to be in any way behind anybody else.

Frankly, I never did get the courage to ask about my sight. About five weeks later they removed the bandages from one eye. I was able to see with that one at least.

However, after that first grim half-hour, I began to make plans. First, I wanted to be self-sufficient by doing everything I possibly could for myself. The nurses and doctors helped a lot. They let me do it.

Also, I decided never to attempt anything until I was sure I could do it. I was afraid of failure. Each accomplishment, I knew, would restore some of my confidence. A failure would give me a setback.

First test came three or four days after the

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bandages were taken from my eyes. A hanging bell-button in my room was, in itself, a challenge. I mapped out a plan for ringing that bell the next time I should want an orderly.

Half-an-hour later I hopped out of bed and stepped over to the bell, then leaned against the pear-shaped button container with my left forearm, anchoring it firmly against the wall. Then I manipulated my right elbow until it was up against the bell-button itself. I went through a lot of contortions, but I rang the bell. The French-Canadian orderly who answered was astounded.

Second test came a day or so later. The door of my room, usually ajar, blew shut. I could have had the orderly open it, but I knew if I intended to be self-sufficient I would have to open and close doors. First I half-knelt in front of it and placed my left stump on top of the knob and my right underneath, so that the knob was locked between my two forearms. I pulled the two arms in different directions, trying to turn the knob as I pulled. After several attempts I succeeded.

I learned to help myself to a drink of water by grasping the glass between my two wrists. Also, I found I could hold a packet of cigarettes between my wrists and extract one cigarette with my teeth. To light it I would shake a match out of the box, hold the box between my wrists and use my teeth to strike the match. When it was burning properly I dropped it into an ash-tray, picked up the cigarette again and leant over the flame to light it. It was awkward, tedious, and slow. But each hurdle I overcame added to my self-confidence.

I began to look after my personal toilette. It used to fascinate the patients and staff alike to see me brushing my teeth and shaving myself, holding my toothbrush or razor between my two stumps.

Nothing made me feel so helpless as the fact that I had to be hand-fed. Mastering the problem of eating was, in my opinion, the first big step I would have to take.

One day I managed to slide a spoon up under one of my wrist bandages and a fork under the other. It worked, and I was able to feed myself, except for cutting my meat and seasoning my food. Lads in the workshop helped me to develop a special spoon and fork, with leather straps and buckles attached, which I could put on and take off by using my teeth.

MY progress was far from easy and pleasant. But there were compensating incidents, such as the time Sergeant McClelland came to see me for the first time after he had been given an artificial eye. Somehow or other he had put it in wrong side about and it gave him the fiercest look I have ever seen in any man. He must have seen from my expression that something was wrong, but when he discovered what it was, and the correct adjustment was made, we both laughed until the tears came.

One day two of the sergeant-majors of my unit drove over to take me to camp for a visit. Getting into the truck without hands was a problem. I suppose my equilibrium was a little disturbed, because I staggered as I started to get in. One of the sergeant-majors reached out a hand to help me. I have never in my life experienced such a terrific wave of resentment. I wanted to hit him. It was a reaction absolutely foreign to me, so all the way to camp I tried to analyse my reason for the feeling. I realised I would have to be sane about this thing, that I couldn't go around feeling resentful, and that I would have to accept help in the spirit in which it was intended. 'You can do it yourself, so what difference does it make?' I told myself. 'If people want to help you, then just accept their kindness.' I finally realised that this was the answer to the whole business—the knowledge that I could do the thing myself.

When I went back to camp my first efforts were devoted to learning how to write. One of the boys from the workshop helped me to devise an appliance to strap on my forearm, with which I could hold pencil and pen. It worked, and my first letter was sent off to my wife. My handwriting had changed little. The banks honoured my signature without question. That day I wrote again I realised that my worry of earning a living was over. I was no longer handicapped.

LESS than four months after the accident I was sent to Roehampton Hospital, London, to be fitted with artificial attachments. I took to my new hands—metal hooks which opened as a result of a shoulder motion—like a duck to water. Almost immediately I saw new horizons. Ten days after I was fitted I was asked to put on a demonstration for medical officers. When I came to the meeting I fastened each of my attachments on myself,

LIVING WITHOUT HANDS

took cigarettes out of packages, lighted them myself, shaved, brushed my teeth, used a typewriter, and wrote by hand.

People often ask me if I am sensitive about my hooks. My answer is—"No!" These hooks are my hands. I need them to live. They make me self-supporting and self-sufficient. In restaurants I cut my own meat and require no more attention than any other diner. People look at me, of course, but I realise that indirectly I am doing a job for other amputation cases.

The day I arrived home I was afraid that the full realisation that I was without hands might prove to be a very severe shock to my wife. I needn't have worried. She took it in full stride. Sympathetic officers from the various aid societies had prepared her for that, calling on her almost as soon as word was received I was an amputee.

Next test was when I applied for my old job at the local newspaper-office where I worked as sports page editor. My chief told me he was glad to see me back, and that if my old job proved beyond my present capabilities, then I was welcome to try anything they had for me. But there was no need. I went back to my desk, and to the routine so well known on a small town weekly. How unconscious people are of my artificial hands is best illustrated by the fact that absent-minded players on the football field often hand me the ball and say: "Think the pressure's high enough in this ball?"

To-day I am self-sufficient. I dress and undress myself completely. I have my own workshop and look after my own garden. Last winter I bought my own home, and did many of the remodelling jobs needed inside. I am active in community affairs and last year coached a local rugby football team to success. Among my hobbies are included knitting and weaving.

Amputation cases are only disabled to the extent which they themselves allow. It is what we still have that counts, and very few of us have lost the ability to think for ourselves.

To the nearest and dearest of amputees and to the amputees themselves I say from experience: 'Never despair.'

A long and useful life is ahead of every amputee if he gets the right sort of help and encouragement. His training for his future work begins before he leaves the hospital. The chances are that in most cases his future is planned before he is finally discharged. He should be encouraged to do things for himself. Never let him feel that he is considered handicapped and never do anything which may make him sensitive about his appliances. They are supplied for his use and will benefit him throughout life.

Under the intelligent training and placement plans laid down for amputees the future can be faced with confidence. That future is as bright as we can make it. The answer lies within ourselves.

The Aul' Fiddle

*Her strings is raxed,
The briggle's doon,
Her peer wee body's thick wi' stew.
She's lyin' idle o' the shelf—
Folks sniffs at fiddle-diddle noo.*

*Nae far awa, abeen the skirls,
Ah hears the boxie's pechin' din.
A barefaced laddie, sweatin' hard,
Ca's the contraption oot an' in.*

*The spring's the same, an' sae's the reel,
As fan we dansit i' the bow.
Bit fyles Ah think they're nae sae blythe
As we wis birlin' lang ago.*

K. M. MACLEOD.



Dunphy's Hide

D. E. CHARLWOOD

WHEN I was ten we went from Melbourne to live at Henty Cove. Dunphy's father was policeman there, though why the place needed a policeman I could never see. Only about three hundred people live at the Cove, and they were such a quiet lot that I don't remember old Dunphy ever making an arrest. Perhaps that's why he was so hard on his son—because he never got any excitement in the town.

The two things I remember best about the place are the coastline and Dunphy. The roar of the sea was with us always, sometimes just a steady, droning sound rising from the foot of the cliffs, but other times so fierce that it kept me awake at night. Though I knew the cliffs were two hundred feet high, it used to sound as if the waves were breaking on the verandah where I slept.

All along the coast there had been wrecks—the *London*, the *Schomberg*, the *Loch Ard*, the *Redjacket*. Dunphy knew stories about each of them. Probably he made up a few himself, because making up stories was all he was really good at. In school when old Searby let us choose our own subject for composition, Dunphy would always write something weird and gripping with wrecks in it. At everything else he was hopeless—which was why he was

only in grade six by the time he had turned fourteen.

We liked Dunphy at school. Perhaps we liked him because of his strength—he was six feet and he weighed twelve stone, and he could swim and climb better than anyone I've ever known. He swam one day across the channel at Serpell's Rocks—the most dangerous water around that part of the coast. I ran hard round to the other side; but when I got there he was pulling himself out, his red hair over his face and his huge chest glistening. He said: 'I'd better run home. The old man said I had to be in by five.'

For Dunphy to be frightened when he was so big seemed nonsense. He ran back, then, with me panting behind him. Sure enough, he got into a row with his old man and took a pretty bad beating. He had no mother to soften things up for him.

My dad was highly respected by old Dunphy. I believe old Dunphy thought that being postmaster in the Cove was something really important. My dad spoke to him a few times about being so hard on his son.

'It'll do him no harm,' old Dunphy used to say. 'It's not half what I used to get—and I'd have got on better maybe if I'd been licked a bit more often.'

DUNPHY'S HIDE

IT was at school that I first heard about Dunphy's Hide. It was a place somewhere along the coast that Dunphy used to go to alone—a sort of cave that only he knew and where he could hide without ever being found.

Two or three times a couple of boys had tried to follow Dunphy to find where he went. He walked east along the edge of the cliffs, while they dragged about a quarter of a mile behind him. Now and again he'd sink into the heath, then, after a bit, go on again. The last time he stood up, he ran quickly, then dropped down once more, and that was the last they saw of him.

They didn't explore very carefully, partly because it was a frightening sort of place, anyway. The sea there rushed underground and came roaring up into a blowhole about three hundred yards from the cliffs. The blowhole was over two hundred feet deep and enough to scare the gamest of us. Each wave would come ripping and tearing through the passage underground, then explode against the walls of the hole. Deep down in it, long strands of kelp grew, and these swung about with the waves like the hair of drowned women.

We never used to stay about there long. Round the edge it was gravelly with a bit of scrub growing. It would have been easy to have slipped in—and, once in, even Dunphy couldn't have got out of it.

At one end a small creek used to trickle in, but the sound of it was swallowed up by the gulping and roaring that came from the mouth of the hole. Near the creek, low down in the heath, was a stone like a headstone. We could just make out the worn lettering on it: 'To the Memory of Janet Glover, aged 6 years, Who Lost Her Life at this Place on 29th June 1873.' The hole was called Glover's Drop.

WE were still in grade six and I was eleven when I saw Dunphy's Hide. Dunphy took me there himself.

As I've said, Dunphy was only good at writing. At arithmetic, and especially oral arithmetic, he was hopeless. In fact, it used to worry him terribly when he tried to do the simplest addition.

One day in November we were to do the oral arithmetic for an exam to see if we'd go away to a city school the next year. Dunphy was nearly sick for a week before it. 'I'll never get away from here,' he told me. 'The old man'll kill me.'

I was pretty good at oral, but how I could help Dunphy I couldn't see. In those days it was: 'Stand by your desks! Hands on your heads!' Then the question was written on the board. After one minute Searby would shout: 'Write!' It was pretty frightening, even when you were good at it.

Searby used to copy the questions from a small black book every exam time. Seeing that book was Dunphy's only hope. The night before the exam, while Searby was over seeing my dad, I got into the school and saw the book. Next morning I had Dunphy learning the answers before school. Even then, he only got six out of ten—but he passed.

He came to me after and, making sure no one was about, he said: 'I'll take you to the Hide.'

I felt weak around the knees. 'When?' I asked, making an effort to keep my voice from trembling.

'Three o'clock Saturday,' he said.

The Saturday was windy with squalls in from the straits. All night the giant sound of waves had stepped on our porch. Sometimes two waves had slapped together, like a sharp clap of thunder. In the morning the thought of Dunphy's Hide weighed down on me.

At three I met Dunphy at the back of the police-station. He was whistling as if nothing was going to happen; but I noticed that he had a torch jammed in his hip-pocket.

When we got out along the cliffs, he stopped and turned to me. 'Do you promise to show no one the Hide?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Say it,' he ordered. '"I promise to show no one the Hide, so help me God."'

'I promise to show no one the Hide, so help me God.'

The wind blew his ginger hair round his face as he leant forward to hear me against the din of the sea. He nodded, then hurried along the edge of the cliff.

Another squall was coming up, bringing rain like a grey curtain from the south-west. The waves had spray streaming out behind them.

Dunphy didn't seem to notice such things. He walked a couple of feet from the edge of the cliff with hardly a glance to either side. About two miles from Henty Cove he stopped and looked round, then we dropped into the heath. The rain pelted down on us, hiding the sea and the outlook behind us. When it had cleared, Dunphy looked back. Then

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he said: 'No one has seen us. We'll go straight to the Hide.'

He stood up and walked quickly through the wet heath. I saw then that we were heading for Glover's Drop, and I felt sick. I didn't say anything, but just followed Dunphy, watching his shoulders for comfort.

WHEN we reached the Drop, I was too scared to look into it. But Dunphy turned away again, back towards the cliffs, walking directly over the passageway to the sea. The ground was trembling under our feet, so that I began expecting the whole place to cave in.

Halfway to the cliffs there was a clump of trees standing among rocks. Dunphy dropped down amongst them, and when I had done the same he looked all round again. He said: 'I've never taken anyone to the Hide.'

'No,' I answered. I tried to let him know by my voice that I was grateful; but I wished we were home.

'You helped me the other day.'

'It wasn't much,' I said.

'Oh, there have been other times, too. I reckon I might get to the city school now.'

It was strange talking about school, because this didn't seem like the Dunphy who sat beside me at all. He looked even older and bigger than he really was, and somehow he reminded me of a pirate.

He got up and from somewhere in the heath he picked up an iron bar. Then he went to a rock about three feet across and pried at it carefully. It fell a few feet sideways, and I saw a hole big enough for a man to get through but looking black as night. Out of it came the noise of the sea with a hollow sound, like a voice through a megaphone.

Dunphy said: 'Come in after me,' and he dropped into the hole.

My legs felt like putty, but somehow I followed straight after him.

'Move back a bit and I'll swing the rock across,' he said. He took the weight of it on his shoulders, then turned his body till it fell into place. We were pitched into darkness, alone with the noise.

Dunphy switched on the torch. 'Keep close behind me.'

We began crawling along a tunnel, like a large rabbit-burrow, going slowly downward all the time towards Glover's Drop. At that moment I would have run away; but the

thought of going back and trying to move the rock was worse than the thought of going on.

The noise got stronger, the passageway shuddering with each wave. Dunphy crawled in front of me, never saying a word and never looking back.

At last we could stand up, and then I saw there was daylight somewhere ahead of us. Dunphy switched the torch off and shouted into my ear: 'When we get outside, put your feet right where I put my feet.'

I followed him round a turn to the left, then another to the right, while the light in front got brighter. All at once we were outside, drenched with spray and deafened by waves. It was full daylight and so bright that I didn't see at first that our ledge was no more than four feet wide. Over the side was the green water of the Drop, heaving up towards us, then sinking back and back, till it seemed as if the hole might empty itself.

I stood without moving. Dunphy must have been shouting at me, but it wasn't until he shook my arm that I remembered him. He pointed up above us and I saw that we were about twenty feet below the ground and back underneath the gravelly edge of the Drop. Up there I saw the scrub growing and clouds hurrying by.

He beckoned me, but I couldn't move. He frowned and leaned over me. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' I said.

'We'd better hurry—it's getting late.'

I moved after him slowly, putting my feet just where he put his. Another squall was coming up, darkening the bit of sky over our heads. The crashing of the waves was growing louder, but I kept my eyes away from them, looking only at Dunphy's boots.

He turned once and shouted something, but I only heard one word—'slippery'.

Next moment I sprawled on my face. I shouted after Dunphy, crying like a baby; but he was walking on carefully. I pulled myself on to my knees and crawled after him, calling out his name as I went; but he didn't hear me.

The ledge had narrowed to three feet and it dropped straight into the water. I kept my eyes turned away from it and crawled madly for about ten feet. Then the ledge widened and with a panicky jump I was up with Dunphy again, shivering with fright. And that was where we reached the Hide.

DUNPHY'S HIDE

THE Hide was a cave back off the ledge with a narrow crack for an entrance. I sat in a heap on the floor, my head in my arms, while Dunphy looked round for matches. A candle flared up throwing shadows on to a high roof. The sea seemed to boom all round us and in my nose was a strong, salty smell.

I looked round for Dunphy. He was sitting on an old wooden trunk, battered at the corners and very dark in colour. He sat on it as if it was a throne. 'This is the Hide,' he said.

I nodded. I didn't care much where it was.

'Do you reckon any of the others know where it is?' I said in a weak voice.

'I've been coming here for two years,' he said. He tapped the trunk. 'I found this outside on the ledge—must have got thrown up in a big storm. I dragged it in through the crack. Now I keep books in it. Like to read?'

'No,' I said, 'I don't feel very well.' I had to fight not to burst into tears.

'What's the matter?'

'I'm scared,' I said.

His eyes widened. 'Gee, what about? The exams are over—and, anyway, you'll pass for sure.'

'I'm scared about getting back.'

'Back where?'

I pointed outside.

'That's easy,' said Dunphy. 'Just follow close behind me. We could get going now.'

I shook my head. 'I couldn't,' I said.

'Well, we'll crawl, then.'

'Let's wait a bit,' I said.

'All right, then.'

He gave me a book from the trunk and he kept off the subject; but while I tried to look at the book I saw him watching me. What the book was I don't remember. I only remember feeling my heart hammering louder than the sea and seeing Dunphy watching me, looking worried. I knew that if I went on to the ledge I'd fall, as sure as Janet Glover had fallen a long time before. I saw her falling and screaming. Over and over again I saw the same thing.

'Well,' Dunphy said, 'we'll get going. We're a bit late.'

'I can't,' I said.

'You've got to,' he answered. 'How d'you reckon you'll get home?'

'I don't know,' I said.

'Come on—take it slowly.'

I dragged myself up and went out with him. The noise and spray came at us with a rush, wetting us to the skin. The light in the patch of sky had faded, making the water look worse than it had before.

'We'll go slowly,' shouted Dunphy.

I shook my head.

'It's easy,' he said.

He ran across the narrow part of the ledge, jumping over the slippery patch of earth. Then he spun round and ran back. 'Easy!'

I suddenly began to cry, and couldn't stop. Dunphy looked at me like a worried dog. 'I'll get a rope. Would a rope help?'

I grabbed at this idea hopefully. 'Yes, a rope!' I said.

'Wait in the Hide then. There's a rope near the rock.'

I went back alone through the crack into the candlelight. The candle was getting near its end and it made the shadows jump across the walls with its flickering. I lay down on some bags Dunphy had put on the floor and began counting. I counted softly at first, then out loud. I counted to a thousand; but at the same time my mind filled with questions. What if Dunphy had slipped? What if Dunphy couldn't move the rock? What if a wave washed through into the Hide?

I crawled outside again. It was almost dark, and I was supposed to have been home by five. When I went back to the Hide the candle had gone out. I lay with my head in my arms and my eyes closed and counted to a thousand again. Something had happened—I knew for certain.

I WAS counting again in a panic when something touched my foot. I sat straight up and saw Dunphy with the torch. He looked worried. 'We're in trouble,' he said. 'The old man is out looking for us, and your old man too. I saw them near the top of the Drop. And the rope's gone. We've got to get out.'

'I can't,' I blubbered.

'You've got to!'

'I'd fall. I couldn't do it.'

'I'll carry you across,' he said.

'No—no, we'd both go in.'

He shone the torch in my face. 'You've got to go! Do you get that? Got to go. Come on now!'

But I stood fixed there, crying like a girl, while the waves boomed all round us.

I saw Dunphy bite his lip. He crossed him-

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self and after a few seconds he crossed himself again. He looked at me wildly, then swung his arm back and hit me with all his strength. The torch turned upside down, and that was all I remembered of Dunphy's Hide . . .

A cold wind brought me round. It was moonlight and I was hanging upside down, jolting uncomfortably. My head was aching terribly. 'Let me down,' I shouted.

'Shut up!' hissed Dunphy. He dropped me off his shoulders into the heath. 'They're coming this way!'

I suddenly forgot everything that had happened. 'Where are they?'

'There, along the cliff—they heard you call out.'

I saw they were coming our way. They shouted something at us, but we couldn't hear them. Dunphy stood beside me, looking just as he did when he tried to do oral arithmetic.

'How did you do it?' I said to him quietly.

He looked at me with frightened eyes. 'I laid you out and carried you. You won't split?'

'No,' I said.

OUR fathers were only a few yards away. Mine reached us first. He bent over me. 'Are you all right, boy?'

'Yes,' I said.

Behind him I could see old Dunphy, and I knew what was going to happen. He shone his torch up and down his son, panting all the time as if he'd been running. 'What do you mean by it?'

Dunphy stood stock still, hardly breathing. He said: 'I'm sorry, sir.'

'Sorry!' shouted his old man. 'You'll be sorry when you've tasted my belt.'

'We got held up—'

'Where?'

Dunphy moved his arm somewhere behind us; but it seemed as if his own hand wouldn't point for him.

'You're lying!'

'No, sir!'

'You're lying! Give me the truth.'

I saw my dad put his hand on old Dunphy's arm, but he didn't seem to notice it. I felt sick. There was Dunphy who was bigger and stronger than his father and he was too scared to move. All he could say was: 'Not lying, sir; not lying, sir.'

'You contradict me?'

'No, sir. We got held up round by—by—'

'You're a liar!' shouted the old man. He stepped forward and hit Dunphy across the mouth with the back of his hand.

Something inside me burst. 'You bully!' I shouted. 'He saved my life!'

Everyone stopped speaking. In the moonlight I could see them looking at me.

My dad said quietly: 'What was it? What happened?'

They were quiet again, waiting for me to speak; but my throat had dried up.

Old Dunphy said: 'Go on, lad.' After the way he had spoken before, his voice sounded almost kind.

'He saved me,' I said again, 'at Serpell's Rocks.'

'Yes?'

'We were fishing along the channel there and a wave washed me off. I wouldn't have got out, but he came in after me.' Our clothes were in such a mess that this could have been true. But I could see old Dunphy didn't believe me.

'A tough place to fall in,' he said, looking at me. 'Could a boy really swim there?'

Dunphy suddenly answered for himself. His voice surprised me, and it surprised his old man. 'I've swum across it before,' he said.

What he said was true—I'd seen him do it.

When no one answered him he said: 'I'll go there now.'

I knew he meant it. He began walking away, and I followed him. I didn't look round to see if my dad was following; I just knew I had to go with Dunphy.

We had gone a few yards when his old man shouted: 'Come here!'

'We'll go on,' said Dunphy to me.

'We'd better go back,' I answered.

Dunphy hesitated a bit, then turned back. He went straight to his father and said: 'I'm not a liar. I'll do it to-night.'

For a long time no one said anything. At last old man Dunphy said: 'We'll go home and we'll say no more about it, eh—neither the fright you gave us, nor the swearing at a policeman, eh?'

I waited for Dunphy to answer, but he looked so shaken that I answered for him. 'Yes,' I said.

'We'll go to our place for supper,' said my dad.

'Thank you,' answered old Dunphy. 'Very kind of you.'

Our fathers started off in front of us and

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Dunphy and I trailed behind. They couldn't hear us talking for the noise of the sea.

Dunphy said: 'Thanks for not splitting.'

'That's all right,' I answered.

We walked along the cliff, past Flinder's Reef, where the *Calcutta* went down. In the

moonlight I was able to see the foam on it.

Just then Dunphy stopped me. Holding my arm he said: 'You won't take any other kids to the Hide, will you?' He was looking at me seriously.

'No,' I said, 'never.'

Flowers of the Desert

The Delights of Cactus-Growing

ROSE TENENT

FEW hobbies offer greater interest and variety than cactus-growing. Not only are there more than 5000 different species from which to choose, but in this extensive family are to be found also some of the most remarkable plants in the world. For example, there are the Prickly Pear Cacti, covering over 300 varieties, and so called from the spiny pear-shaped fruits they produce; there is the Old Man Cactus, thus named because the upper parts of the stem have long, white matted hairs, giving the appearance of a very old man's head; there are the Thin-ribbed Cacti, representing trees, bushes, vines, and so on; plants with edible berries; plants sweetly scented; and plants that only flower after dark.

Most cactus and succulent collections begin with a plant or cutting, probably the gift of a friend. Or it may be that a few seeds have been sown with good results, and so the interest grows. In my own case, I began with one of the Rebutias, a light green sparsely-spined dwarf cactus. This soon presented me with such a glorious wealth of scarlet flowers that I needed no further encouragement to go out and buy more stock.

For do not imagine that cacti do not flower, or, as some people erroneously assume, flower only once in seven years. It is true, of course, that to produce flowers some types

need an abnormally long and hot summer. Nevertheless, it is equally true that hundreds of varieties will give an abundance of flowers each year, provided their individual requirements are understood by the grower.

Plants which produce flowers most readily are usually the smallest types—Rebutias, Lobivias, Mammillaria, Gymnocalycium, Notocactus, Echinopsis, to mention but a few. Of these, the Rebutias generally give the least cultural difficulties. Try a group of such plants in a window-sill and you should have a wealth of glistening flowers in various shades of red and orange-red, yellow and violet, all through the spring and summer. Most species like full sunshine, although some thrive better if partially shaded.

Rather larger than Rebutias are Lobivias, with flowers in white, yellow, or red. In shape the plants are round or cylindrical, ribbed, and usually very spiny. They are easy to grow provided they are not over-watered in winter.

Of the Mammillaria there are over 200 different species. All make good room plants, growing easily from seed or cuttings, and flowering freely each year. A lovely and popular variety is the *Mammillaria bocasana*, a tubular cactus with white hairs, producing many beautiful small flowers and red fruits. Another great favourite is the *Mammillaria*

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elegans. Shaped like a sphere, this plant has pure-white spines and a crown of red flowers.

You will certainly want the Old Man Cactus. The botanical name of this plant is *Cephalocereus senilis*, and it is but one of an enormous family, which also includes the famous night-flowering cacti. There are several of these, but perhaps the most popular for indoor culture is *Hylocereus undatus*, better known as the Honolulu Queen. It has pure-white flowers, resembling water-lilies, and each one measures up to twelve inches in diameter. This plant probably will not flower very often, but when it does it is a thrilling sight, and in the Hawaiian Islands, its native home, festivals are held in its honour.

BUT what exactly is a cactus? The name is derived from the Greek word *kaktos*, the name of a prickly plant. It belongs to a very large family of succulents, so called because they can survive long periods of drought by living on the water stored in their leaves, stems, or roots.

Although all cacti are succulents, not all succulents are by any means cacti. The true cactus comes from America, especially from the states of Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. It varies tremendously in size and shape, but, with the exception of the species known as *Pereskia*, bears very few leaves. But the great distinguishing feature is the areole, which is a kind of miniature pincushion from which the spines arise. The spines may be one or more in number, awl-shaped, curved, sheathed, stiff, papery, ridged, and so on. But plants which have spines without these little pincushions at the bottom cannot be cacti.

In the American deserts the temperature during the day may be very high, but the nights are often cool. There are times when the cacti are covered with snow. Rain only falls at definite periods. It is, of course, impossible to imitate the exact conditions of these hot, arid regions. Nevertheless, if we want our plants to flourish we must do our best to provide as much sunlight as possible, as well as giving them the right amount of water at the right time.

It is impossible to lay down definite rules regarding watering, so much depends upon the individual plants, soil, weather conditions, and so on. Like most plants, however, cacti need plenty of water during the growing

period, but, with the exception of the winter-flowering types, such as the Christmas Cactus, water should be gradually decreased from about the end of September. During the winter months cacti are kept comparatively dry at the roots, being given only just enough water to keep the soil from completely drying out.

The best method of watering is to immerse the whole pot in a bowl or bucket, so that the water is just above the rim of the pot. If the soil is well prepared, air bubbles will appear. Watch these, so that when they cease you will know that the plant has had sufficient water. If possible, use rainwater, or at least water of room temperature.

EVEN more exotic in appearance than cacti are the other succulents, which, with a few exceptions, come from the eastern deserts of the world. They vary tremendously in form and colour, many types being very leafy. Some of them consist of delicate rosettes, others grow tall stems resembling miniature palm-trees, while yet others develop waxy coverings of beautiful pink or white tint which makes them look like alabaster.

One of the most popular of these succulents is the Kleinia, or Candle Plant. It has a fleshy, cylindrical stem, the sections of which are joined to each other and vary in size to resemble sausages, snakes, marbles, and so on, according to the size of the pot and amount of light the plant receives. If the plant is kept in a dark corner, for example, the stem-sections will become very thin, long, and pale. This is known as etiolation.

Among the better known of the leafy varieties are the Houseleeks, or to give them their proper name, *Sempervivums*. One species is known as the Cobweb Cactus, because it consists of small brownish-green rosettes, between which runs a chain of very fine hairs giving the appearance of a spider's web. These plants are so popular and easily cultivated that it has been said of them:

*They never sulk, they never cry;
They smile at every kind of sky.
They grow on walls, on roofs they revel,
And thrive as well upon the level.*

Perhaps the most fascinating of all the succulents, however, are what are known as Mimicry Plants or Living Stones. They come from the deserts of South Africa—the Karroo

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and Namaqualand—and in form and colour are so like the circumjacent stones that it is not easy to find them in their natural surroundings.

Many species, mostly small in size, imitate rock or gravel. Other types resemble limestone, while still others could easily be taken for silvery-white pebbles. Some varieties are so small that a hundred plants could very comfortably be housed in a space thirty-six inches by twenty-four inches. These plants bear remarkable flowers, often bigger than the plant bodies.

TO obtain the full beauty of a cactus and succulent collection your plants must be arranged effectively. A small collection in the window of a living-room can give quite as much pleasure and interest as a large number of plants in a greenhouse, and if you are

fortunate enough to have a bay-window facing south there is almost no limit to what you can grow successfully.

If you intend growing only a few plants, it is a good idea to put a number of small ones into a large pot. This should be filled to at least one-third of its depth with drainage material, such as broken and crushed brick, gravel, coarse grit, or something similar. Opinions differ regarding potting mixtures. The compost I use is recommended by the National Cactus and Succulent Society and consists of three parts loam, two parts sharp river sand, one part thoroughly decomposed leaf-mould, two parts broken brick, and half a part of broken old mortar rubble. The addition of a little charcoal will help to keep the soil sweet. If you do not want to go to the trouble of mixing your own compost, a good one can be obtained from most firms specialising in cactus and succulent plants.

A Song for Yule

*When winds are a-whistle by chimney and rafter,
Now under the eaves and now under the roofs,
A-waning to whispers, a-waxing like laughter,
With noise that comes after like galloping hoofs.*

*When snow is a-drifting by barn and by furrow,
And roads there are none that are safe for the wain,
Then bring ye the flagon to drive away sorrow,
And bid ye good morrow to winter again.*

*And let all your voices together go swelling
With glasses held high to the sound of your glee,
And heap on the hearthstone the logs of your felling,
Still sweet and foretelling the springtime to be.*

*Though year after year hurry by ever faster,
With hope in your heart you shall mock at their flight,
For courage and faith are together Time's master,
Whom hidden disaster shall never affright.*

*And though the wide skies be all sleety and sable,
And though on a day your old bones may be racked,
While Yuletide brings joy and good cheer to the table,
Your age is a fable, your youth is a fact.*

*So frost shall not chill you nor make you grow sadder,
No heartache shall follow the songs you have sung,
But dauntless of spirit you'll mount the long ladder,
And yearly grow gladder until the last rung.*

GORDON NEVILLE.

Post-Office Without Bars

OLIVE NORTON

IT is a great comfort to constant stamp-buyers like ourselves not to have to live in the town. By all accounts their post-offices are very different from ours. Not that all accounts are to be believed. We are inclined to think it must be six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. There must be a good many people walking about with unblemished features and unwrung necks who, but for a bit of wire-netting, might bear the scars of their ineptitude for life.

Townsfolk who make a hobby of baiting the counter assistants, and writing bitter little pieces to the papers about their defections, should give thanks for the understanding department which elects to surround their victims with little fences to protect them from the violence of their own passions.

We ourselves have never found, for example, that even in town anyone actually finishes a whole row of knitting while we wait; at the savings end of the counter, which is comparatively quiet, they may perhaps snatch a second to complete the delicate operation known as 'pass the slipped stitch over', but to suggest that anything more outrageous takes place is a gross exaggeration.

In our own post-office there is never any knitting lying about at all. Even after Doris, who has just left, had bought her pram and begun to come in after clevenses looking pale, we never saw so much as the cast-off edge of a tiny garment, much less work in progress. But then, we have no grille, either. We had one once, but Mr Jimson used it to repair his broody coops, and now there is much more room on the counter for the rack of seed-packets, the bruised-soap box, and the lilac cards of aspirin tablets.

THE fact that it takes four people to keep the traffic moving in our post-office is

perhaps some indication of its popularity, for we live in a small place, as places go. All four are quite incapable of being rude, or even detached. When we want the box unlocked because we have posted our new stockings by mistake, or ask them for things they are always out of, such as Commonwealth reply coupons, the most they do is to look wistful and perhaps slam down the rubber-stamp a little harder on the next target. We did once see Cora aim a vicious kick at a recumbent mailbag, but she was far from well at the time, and old Mrs Perkins can be very ruffling, sometimes wanting to be given her Friday pension all in shillings, and at other times in half-crowns.

Motorists who stop in the village for cigarettes or stamps always take Mr Jimson for the postmaster. He is not. Indeed, we have not been able to discover that he has any official status at all, in spite of being the rock on which several ephemeral postmasters have been broken like so many pebbles.

We are a little sorry for the most recent pebble, Mr Twigg. He has only been postmaster for a few months, and the others are so assiduous in making things easy for him that he is apt to get pushed well-meaningly into the background. Yet he already knows us all by name, and remembers our foibles with astonishing accuracy.

Because he always has to peer round someone else's helpful bulk, or even semaphore to us over a cairn of parcels, in order to ask us how the motor-scooter is going, or to tell us that the big envelopes have come if we want some, he has acquired a reputation for having a lot of quiet charm, which is probably quite unfounded. We feel sure that one day he will get past Mr Jimson and Cora and Mrs Pengelly and really come into his own. They will soon be letting him issue wireless licences all by himself, and he will probably be able

POST-OFFICE WITHOUT BARS

to release quantities of suppressed libido by banging away with the stamp. At present he never gets his hands on it, even to practise on the blotting-paper. He sometimes makes unsuccessful sallies, though only to be foiled by the eager fingers of whoever happens to be minding him at the moment, usually Mr Jimson.

MR JIMSON is seventy-four, and a single-minded man of great inflexibility of purpose. Having once heard that we were something to do with the Old People's Welfare Committee he has never forgotten it, and has thrown himself into the role of informer with great diligence. He draws us on one side, near the stack of firelighters, and relates dire stories in a conspiratorial whisper, with much head-wagging, and is very partial to such euphemisms as 'getting him to the outside place', or 'her internal trouble'.

Most of his alarms prove on investigation to be largely the product of his tender-hearted imagination. We know by now that if Bob Smith is described as living in frightful squalor, quite alone, we shall be pretty sure to find him surrounded by the young Smiths, and all the little Smiths, looking as fresh as a buttercup and eating things we can't afford ourselves. If we hear that old Maggie is 'ready to slip her cable, poor soul'—for Mr Jimson is given to nautical phrases—we shall almost certainly bump into her just down the road, lugging a string-bag of beetroot and waving a bottle of vinegar at us with facetious remarks about it not being beer.

Fortunately, white-haired Mr Jimson is just as susceptible to little cattle as anyone else, so that when he is too much of a handful for the polite frustrated Mr Twigg, Cora and Mrs P. can usually manage him.

Cora—a large heavily-engaged ash-blonde—has the kind of skin at which we stand and daydream, while she waits patiently for us to tell her whether we want three and ninepenny cigarettes, or whether it is a self-denial day calling for three and sevenpenny ones. Cora has very fixed ideas about social security, and thinks a good many things are 'all wrong'. She would stop our family allowances if she could, but we know it is not a personal matter and never take offence when she tells us so, as she does whenever she pays them. We agree volubly with her blunt proposals for a brave new world, feeling rather like an

alien being hospitably indulged by a man who keeps reiterating that he 'can't stand foreigners'.

ON the other side of the shop we feel infinitely less like social parasites. Mrs Pengelly behind the sweet-counter has an enchantment all her own. When she first came, we thought her appealingly-husky voice was a by-product of laryngitis, and used to ask with gentle concern how her cold was. It took us some time to grasp the fact that it was all part and parcel of her small neat fascination.

She has a wonderful gift for asking how we are, in a crooning way that convinces us that someone really cares, after all. People who are depressed find it soothing to be murmured over by Mrs P., so that she sells unbelievable quantities of chocolates and sweets, and no doubt Mr Twigg—who is nobody's fool—foresaw all this when he engaged her at the time of his own accession.

Indeed, for all the kindly thwarting that goes on, Mr Twigg is gradually making his mark in ways as yet undetected by Mr Jimson. He has bought new birthday-cards, and scrapped all the high-gloss horrors with their photogravures of full-blown roses and bare-shouldered young women in gauzy television tops; and but for scorched scraps blown over the hedge into the lane, from his bonfire, reading 'To My Darling Brother' or 'Happy Birthday Cousin Dear', we might never have realised his well-disguised ruthlessness.

He has introduced the ball-point pen to the village—and what will happen when anyone asks Mr Jimson for a refill we dare not think—and there are rumours that he is going to move the back counter. This is a daring blow for freedom which we await with some apprehension, for we are not really sure that Mr Jimson's blood-pressure is up to such upheavals.

We reflect again how very dull it must be to live in town, where even such far-reaching operations as having the fascia-board painted can be carried through without anyone being in the least concerned, so long as he gets his Pools coupon in in time for the Friday evening collection; where we should have to admire Cora's complexion through bars; where Mrs P. would never last a week; and where, very likely, we should have to call Mr Jimson 'sir'.



The Threepenny-Bit

CHARLES MORETON

THE Dempseys were a much-respected family in Tent Road, Mr Dempsey being a tailor in his own business choosing, most democratically, to live in a road in which wage-earners were housed. It was only when I grew much older that I realised that Mr Dempsey, being one of the original credit-dealers in clothing for working-class families, had, perchance, to live amongst his customers.

The Dempsey home was conspicuous among the drab row of soot-grey Victorian houses by reason of a shiny brass-plate screwed to the door and bearing the inscription: 'T. DEMPSEY, RETAIL TAILOR.' Also installed, over the door, was the first electric-globe I ever saw shining outside a house.

In the year 1915, when I was nine years of age, my elder brother and myself were invited to the Dempsey Christmas-party. I had heard much about this Dempsey party from the lads who had been privileged to attend in previous years, and it was said that there were beautiful and luscious things to eat and bottles of ginger-pop to drink. It was also well known that there was a huge Christmas-tree, with presents for all the guests.

The Dempsey boys, Norman and Roland, attended a private school, and Norman could speak French. Once, when we had finished

playing 'Relievo' because it was too dark to see clearly any longer, we had gathered under the gas-lamp by the laundry and Norman, who was sitting on the doorstep, had spoken quite a lot in French and had sworn like a Mr Hutchinson of our acquaintance and had smoked a cigarette which he had shared with a friend, Arthur Bossomy.

I was very impressed and wished I could speak French and smoke as Norman did. He was three years older than me, and his knowledge was amazing and conclusive. Roland was only seven years old, and was not very important except that he owned a clockwork train, complete with lines and signals, which sometimes he could be prevailed upon, when his mother was shopping, to bring out into the road, where we played with it, usually excluding Roland from the game.

THE party was not held in the Dempsey home, but in the Chapel hall some way down the road. This was necessary because of the large number of guests, adult and children, who were invited. I had never been in the Chapel hall as my parents were Church, but I had once climbed up to look through a window, and I knew it was a big hall.

THE THREEPENNY-BIT

I knew, also, that one of the entertainments of the party would be a magical act by Mr Dempsey, who was an amateur conjurer. My elder brother, who had attended the party the previous year, had told me all about it in bed one night: how he had helped in one of the tricks and had been rewarded by a threepenny-bit from Mr Dempsey for his help—and also to buy his secrecy. My brother had shown me the threepenny-bit and had let me hold it. I had never owned a threepenny-bit, and sometimes dreamed that I might be chosen to help Mr Dempsey and earn a similar gift.

My mother made for me a Norfolk suit for the party. She was very proud that we had been invited, and she made me the suit from an old one of my Uncle Harry's. I disliked it when the cloth was cut up and washed and when my mother was pinning the pieces to my jersey for measurement, but I detested it when it was painfully and laboriously finished.

It was obviously home-made. It consisted of a belted jacket, over each shoulder of which ran a wide, raised pleat. It buttoned tightly down the front with six buttons, and the belt was double-buttoned. Of the eight buttons, only five were similar, the other three being 'near enough' as my mother said when I complained. The suit was completed by knickerbocker trousers which buttoned under the knees. There were no pockets—probably because my mother could not make them—and I had to keep my handkerchief tucked into the front of the jacket between two of the buttons. I wore with this suit long black knitted stockings, which insisted on slipping down my calfless legs, and my only pair of thick nailed boots. Round my neck I had a deep celluloid Eton collar and a clip-on bow-tie, which also had belonged previously to my Uncle Harry. No other boy I knew wore a Norfolk suit, and I hated it.

THE party commenced at 4.30 in the afternoon, but my brother and I were there a full quarter of an hour before that time.

At one end of the large room were arranged two long trestle-tables covered with white cloths, on which were plates of sandwiches and teacake, red, green, and yellow jellies, cakes, buns, and mince-pies, and two large copper tea-urns for the adults. For the children were three cases of mixed bottles of mineral waters, and my brother and I examined the labels on the bottles until more guests arrived.

At the other end of the room was a raised platform on which stood a German rose-silk-fronted piano. In the corner stood a large Christmas-tree in a wooden tub. At the base of the tree were heaped wrapped parcels in green, red, and blue tissue-paper. The parcels were named, and I delicately poked in the pile until I saw the parcel bearing my name. It was rectangular and flat in shape and I guessed it was a game of ludo or snakes and ladders.

The tree was beautifully decorated with coloured candles and brightly-coloured glass globes, sugar watches, and pink sugar mice. There were also sugar birds in fragile cages and tiny wooden Dutch dolls, with shiny painted black hair and scarlet cheeks, dangling from the frosted dark-green spikes of the tree. Lying balanced on the branches and clustered at the stem of the tree were the gayest of Christmas crackers. We had never had a Christmas-tree at home and I was fascinated by this glowing, magnificent giant.

As Mrs Dempsey ushered us to our seats at the table she said I looked very nice, and would I please blow my nose. I felt for my handkerchief, but couldn't find it, and had to unbutton the beastly suit all the way down until I discovered it. I was terribly ashamed, as all the rest of the guests were laughing at me, including Marjorie Roberts, who attended the same school as myself and whom I loved very deeply.

Grace was said, and after tea was finished we were organised by the adults, playing games and listening restlessly to various singers and pianists who volunteered to entertain. I was astounded, and most embarrassed, to see Marjorie Roberts dance a graceful measure on the platform to her proud mother's accompaniment on the piano.

MR DEMPSEY had by now arrived, and I saw him talking to various adults and making notes in his little black notebook, which he always carried in his upper waistcoat-pocket. I took up a position by the door of the small room by the platform, where I knew he was forced to see me as he passed through.

Presently he came hustling up, his bald head gleaming pinkly in the gaslight and his silver medals jangling on his watch-chain. I stood directly in his path and, screwing up my courage, said: 'Are you going to do some tricks, Mr Dempsey? If you are, and you want any help for a trick, will you let me help?'

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He looked down at me and said: 'Did your mother make that suit?'

I placed my forearm across the front of the jacket, hiding the three odd buttons. I hated him at that moment—but the vision of the threepenny-bit was stronger than ever. 'Yes,' I replied, defensively. 'And she's not very well.'

He watched me for a second or two and then beckoned me to follow him into the little room, where he proceeded to unpack his case of magical tricks and arranged the articles on a green-baize card-table.

He then explained that one of his tricks would be to make a penny disappear from the platform, and I would produce it from the audience. He gave me the penny and asked me to read the date stamped on the coin. It was a Victoria penny, and the date was 1888. He then told me to put it carefully in my pocket.

Blushing, I said: 'I haven't any pockets.'

He gazed at me, and suddenly I knew he was contemplating finding another helper—one who owned pockets.

I spoke, breathlessly: 'I'll put it down the side of my boot.' I did so, pushing the penny down the side of my left boot by the ankle.

He pushed his finger down, satisfying himself that the penny was safe. 'Right,' he said, 'and, mind, not a word to *anybody*, and I'll see you later.'

I went out to the big hall, treading delicately so as not to disturb the penny. I stood aloof in a corner, refusing to be involved in the games. I was in ecstasy. Mr Dempsey and I were partners in a conspiracy, the existence of which only I in the big hall knew.

In my imagination I mused on the various ways of spending my threepenny-bit. I could make it last four or five days at a ha'penny a time at Todd's little sweet-shop down the hill, or I could go down to town to the Penny Bazaar, where one could spend a whole afternoon quite happily. And if I only spent two-pence in town, with the other penny I could go to the market, where, under hissing naphtha-flares, one could buy a bowl of hot peas or roasted chestnuts.

MR DEMPSEY came on to the platform and placed his card-table carefully in position. The guests, with much giggling and tittering, were seated, and the magical performance began.

I sat between my brother and Mrs Roberts, who vigorously fanned herself with a large painted Japanese fan. I clapped dutifully as the magic was unfolded and refused to comment when my brother said he knew how the tricks were done.

Finally came the disappearing penny, which Mr Dempsey passed round the audience, so that all could see the date, which was 1888. He next dropped the penny in an envelope in the sight of all. The envelope was then placed on the table and Mr Dempsey waved his little black wand over it. The envelope was now shown to be empty, and Mr Dempsey announced that he had, by magic, transferred the penny from the envelope to my boot.

I was completely loyal, and acted disbelief and amazement. Mr Dempsey ordered me to stand on the chair, so that I should be in full view of the audience. I mounted the chair and, as I did so, my clip-on bow-tie broke and dangled loosely at my neck. There was a general laugh, but I didn't care, standing upright on the wooden chair, holding my tie, and facing Mr Dempsey. Upon request, I pulled the penny out from my boot and held it high.

Mr Dempsey ordered: 'Read out the date on the penny.'

I read it out, loudly and confidently: '1888.'

Clapping and cheers completed the performance, and I climbed down from the chair, holding the penny tightly, while my brother reclipped my tie. I made my way to the little room, where Mr Dempsey was repacking his tricks into the case.

I smiled, knowingly. 'Here's your penny, Mr Dempsey,' I said, holding out the hot, sticky coin. He looked up from his case and I noticed his face and bald head were hot and shiny and that tiny beads of perspiration were dangling on his moustache. He grunted: 'Now, don't you tell anybody about this, my lad, and you can keep the penny.'

'Keep the penny?' I stammered, still holding it extended towards him.

'Yes,' he replied, rather testily, and obviously dismissing me from the small room. 'That's all right. Keep it. That's for your help.'

I NEVER felt the same about Mr Dempsey again, and, much later, when we persuaded Roland to bring out his clockwork train, I deliberately overwound it, leaving Roland in tears.

The Long Low Brown Donkey

A Gold Coast Mystery

A. F. K.

THIS is the story of an attack on a woman by an animal described by eye-witnesses as being like a long low brown donkey, of their driving it off, surrounding it and beating it to death—whereupon it vomited two frogs and turned into a man.

At the time I was the District Commissioner of the area concerned—the north-east corner of the Gold Coast. The story was first told me by the participants within a few hours of the event taking place. This account is written with a copy before me of the evidence given at the inquest which I held on the body. The omission of the reference to the frogs was the only noticeable difference between the original account and the evidence later given in court.

The country where this incident occurred is savannah and very thickly populated. Instead of living in villages, the people—Frafra—build their compounds independently, each surrounded by its own farm and picturesquely described as being just out of bowshot of its neighbours. The Frafra are subsistence farmers, grouped in patriarchal families. They do not practise organised or premeditated witchcraft, but they have a firm belief in the existence of werewolves.

I visited the scene of the attack. It was just within the densely-inhabited area. About a dozen compounds were in sight, many more being concealed by corn. To the west only there was bush, unfarmed and uninhabited, about two miles away. Neither the groundnut crop, like low potato foliage, nor the grass was more than eighteen inches high. The chase of the attacker had kept clear of the high cereals and the line gave no cover for an animal bigger than a small dog.

In such settled areas there is no place for the larger wild animals. At night, however,

leopards and hyenas, and possibly an occasional lion, will go from the bush to the area of outlying compounds in search of stray sheep, goats, and dogs. There is little chance of their doing so in daylight.

THE first information which I had of the attack on the Frafra woman and the killing of the attacker was brought to me by four very excited men who came into my station late one afternoon. They had been sent in to me by the Headman of Gamboruno, a place about fifteen miles away.

They reported that at about noon that day a woman with her two children had been sitting in a groundnut farm at Gamboruno when she had suddenly been attacked by an animal like a long low brown donkey. The animal had appeared in front of her from nowhere, and bitten her head, causing terrible scalp-wounds. One of the four messengers had been near by, and on hearing the woman cry out he had turned in her direction and seen the attack taking place. He had rushed to her aid, shouting and throwing stones.

The animal had then turned to the woman's elder child, a girl of about six. But before it could do her much harm it had been frightened off and started to run away. Then men who had heard the shouting quickly ran up and pursued the animal with stones. One of the other three messengers had been among them.

The animal was injured and weakened by the stones thrown and had not gone further than a distance indicated by my informants, and which I estimated to be about a hundred yards, before it was caught up and surrounded by people coming from all directions. The stone-throwing continued until the animal 'was trying to die' (as one of my informants

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expressed it) and they were able to approach sufficiently close to beat it to death with sticks —whereupon it vomited two frogs and turned into a man.

I SENT for the injured woman and the attacker's body.

The woman was carried in the next morning, accompanied by her daughter and baby. She had three terrible gashes on the top of her head, starting wide apart in the region of the crown and converging on the forehead, looking just as if some huge claws had been drawn through the top of her head. She also had a deep cut about two inches long on the back of her left elbow. We had no doctor in the station, and she was handed over to the African dresser to do what he could for her; but I for one did not expect her to live.

The six-year-old daughter had been able to walk in most of the way. She had a small cut on the back of her neck and two snicks on a finger. The baby was unharmed.

Soon after we had disposed of the woman and her children, a kind of marching-song was heard in the distance. I saw a crowd of several hundred people approaching, and in the middle of it were six men carrying shoulder-high something on a stretcher made of branches. When they arrived, they put the stretcher down on the ground and I went over to see. On it was the body of a man. He was dead. The body was unclothed except for the small cotton loincloth, such as is worn throughout the northern frontier area. It was covered with wounds and abrasions of the kind I would expect to see on a body which had been stoned and beaten to death, and there was mud all over it. It had received a heavy blow at the base of the skull; and high in the chest on the left side there was a puncture wound, which I felt fairly sure had been caused by an arrow. I had the body put in the mortuary.

The station mortuary at that time was a square room built of mud bricks and thatched. The door and window frames had neither a door nor windows in them, and the body was therefore exposed to the view of anyone who wanted to go to see it. On this day several hundred people crowded around to take a look at the body and to discuss what it was. I inquired of a good many of them what they thought of it. I could find none who was not firmly convinced that the body in the mortuary

was that of an animal. They admitted that it was generally human in appearance, but nevertheless denied that it was the body of a man. Still less, of course, would anyone admit that he could identify the deceased, although the features would have been quite recognisable to anyone who had known him. I took several individuals into the mortuary and we discussed the anatomy of the body in detail. They agreed that the limbs and other parts of the body were indistinguishable from those of a human being—but as a whole it was an animal.

I WAS now in a peculiar predicament. Provided that the body was human, as Coroner I had to authorise its burial and then hold an inquest. But I was the only person who did contend that the body was human; and although no one was likely to query my having it buried in the Government cemetery, which was in any case only used for strangers who died without friends or relatives to bury them elsewhere, my court proceedings looked as if they were going to contain clear and uncontradicted evidence that I was holding an inquest on the body of an animal. There was no other European in the station nor any African sufficiently sophisticated to controvert the opinions of the local inhabitants. Very fortunately, however, a Veterinary Officer on trek happened to call in that day, before the body had been buried. He agreed to accompany me to the mortuary, and he examined the body. He had no doubt in confirming that it was human, and subsequently gave evidence to that effect at the inquest.

In the care of the dresser, the injured woman made a remarkable recovery, and seven weeks after the attack she was able to attend and give evidence at the inquest which I held on the body. The witnesses were all sworn before giving evidence and, although I doubt whether the swearing had anything to do with it, I have no doubt that they all believed in the truth of what they told me. After the Veterinary Officer had stated that the body was anatomically human, I first took the woman's evidence.

She was a well-built, middle-aged woman, with nothing remarkable about her except the three recently-healed wide gashes coming from the back of her head and almost meeting on her forehead. She told me that she had been in her farm at Gamboruno about midday

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seven weeks ago and was sitting down eating groundnuts with her young daughter and baby. She was bending forward when she heard something move in the grass, and glimpsed an animal which jumped on her and knocked her over. The animal was brown like a donkey. Its feet were like a donkey's, its tail like a donkey's: so were its ears, head, and mouth. But it was not a donkey. She could not say what distinguished this animal from a donkey. It was like a donkey, but it was not a donkey. She was so badly injured that she knew no more than this quick general impression of her attacker.

The third witness was the six-year-old girl. She confirmed that she had been sitting in the groundnut farm about midday with her mother and the baby. She had suddenly seen an animal like a donkey come out of the grass and attack her mother, holding her with its mouth. She was insistent that the animal held her mother with its mouth, despite the fact that her mother's scalp-wounds did not appear to me to be consistent with biting either by a donkey or by any other animal. 'It stood on four thick feet like a donkey's,' she said, 'and it had a short tail; but, as it was biting us, I cannot give a more detailed description than that it was like a donkey.' The girl screamed, and the animal left her mother and held her own head. The only signs of this were the small cut on the back of her neck and the slight wounds on her finger. She screamed again, and the animal desisted and returned to her mother. The first two rescuers then arrived, throwing stones, and the animal broke off from her mother and started after one of them. She did not know what happened after that, and a neighbour who had arrived took her home.

The next witness had heard the woman's first shout and, turning in that direction, he had seen 'a thing, brown, holding a woman with its mouth.' It had a tail like a wolf—as a hyena is invariably called in the Gold Coast—four feet like a donkey's, ears like a lion's, and a very wide mouth. He ran up, throwing stones, and the animal was actually attacking the woman when he first arrived. Other people who had heard her shouts ran up, and the animal left the woman and went for him. He ran off shouting, and the animal turned away from him towards some grass. Between his first seeing it and the arrival of other people he had never lost sight of the animal. He did not join in any further chase

after the animal, but ran home to his compound.

Evidence was then given by a man who had been up a shea-tree. He had heard the woman's shouts and had jumped down from the tree and run towards her. The woman and her daughter were both lying on the ground, and he saw an animal running after the previous witness. It was like a donkey, but was not a donkey. It had four donkey-like feet, a short thick tail, and a mouth like that of a very big cat. The back was grey-brown and there was some white underneath. He attempted to repeat in court the noise which the animal had made, but it was not recognisable by me as anything either animal or human. He had helped to divert the animal from the pursuit of the first witness by throwing stones at it, and succeeded in turning it away towards some grass. Other people arrived and joined in the stoning, and the animal was eventually knocked down after a chase through short grass. The witness indicated a distance from my court to a tree as being the length of the pursuit. I judged it to be some five hundred yards. When I visited Gamboruno the next year and was shown the places where the woman had been sitting and where the chase had ended I found the distance between these places to be four hundred and fifty paces. The witness went on to say that when the animal had been knocked down and exhausted a lot of people closed in around it and beat it to death with sticks. The witness himself did not do so. He was tired and stood behind until he heard people say that it was dead. He did not go to see the body, but went home. From the time when he first saw the animal chasing the fourth witness to the time when it was surrounded so that it could not escape he never lost sight of it. The chase took place over short grass: the animal was much higher than the grass, which only reached its belly.

I then heard from another man who had been attracted by the woman's shouts and who had looked in time to see an animal biting her head. His description was not unlike those of the previous witnesses—the general donkey-like appearance, the short tail and the big red mouth. It was like a wild animal, but he could give it no name. He, too, had joined in the stone-throwing and the chase and was proud to claim that he had taken part in killing the animal. This was not a statement that would have been made on oath by

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someone who believed that he had killed a man. This witness went on to say that he had actually seen the change from animal to man taking place. 'When we beat it to death it turned man. As soon as it was dead we found it was human. It turned while we were beating it. I killed it, and I myself actually saw it turn man.' He said that the change took place slowly, the face, chest, and hands turning first. This witness had afterwards been detailed by the Headman of Gamboruno to watch the body, and he had sat beside it with another man until carriers came at dawn the next day to bring it into my station.

My last witness was the Headman of Gamboruno. His only important evidence was that he could not identify the deceased and that no one was missing either from Gamboruno or from any of the neighbouring settlements.

FROM all this evidence I had to make a finding of the cause of death and of the circumstances in which it had occurred. Moreover, my finding had to be in accordance with the evidence before me, and if I was given sworn, corroborated, and uncontradicted evidence that an animal had turned into a man I was not sure that I was entitled to reject it.

Thanks to the visit of the Veterinary Officer, I was able to say that the dead body was human; and I had little difficulty in finding that death was due to the injuries caused by the stoning and beating. I was not so sure whether the circumstances amounted to murder or to manslaughter—or even possibly to the justifiable homicide of an otherwise escaping felon. I was prepared to find as facts that the people concerned—there must have been about thirty of them who took part in the actual assault—caused the death intentionally, but that they were under such a complete delusion that what they were killing was an animal that they had no intention of killing a man. Indeed, if I were to accept the evidence given, what was killed was an animal, the change to man having taken place only at the moment of death or even later. The Veterinary Officer could only say that the body was human after death and when he saw it.

I had no counsel to assist me with argument about *mens rea* and criminal responsibility for the natural consequences of one's

act, nor did I even have an office containing any of the criminal law textbooks which explain and illustrate what the law means by a guilty intent. I felt certain that none of the participants had any guilty intent in the ordinary meaning of that expression. On the contrary, they all considered that they had performed a meritorious public service in killing a dangerous animal. But I was not so sure that the law would take the same view. And what about the first two men on the scene who had taken part in the assault only to the extent of preventing further attacks by the animal?

With much hesitation I made a finding of manslaughter. This was probably wrong, but I knew that in any case no prosecution was likely to follow. Beyond saying that the manslaughter was committed by people acting under the delusion that the deceased was a dangerous animal which had just nearly killed a woman, I did not attempt to make any further findings.

WELL, what really had happened? Unless one believes in werewolves, and accepts at its face value the eye-witnesses' evidence of a strange animal attacking a woman and changing into its human form when discovered and killed, it is difficult to explain the occurrence. There was no doubt that the woman had been attacked and severely injured. But I could not reconcile the three converging gashes on the top of her head with the statements that the animal had bitten her head and was seen holding her head in its mouth. The wounds looked so obviously like claw-marks. The cut on the back of her elbow must have been received when she had put up her arm to protect her face. It was not until long afterwards that I realised that gashes caused by three huge claws would diverge and not converge and therefore that if the woman's wounds really had been caused by claws the attack must have come from directly behind. The evidence had suggested that it was from the front, and the woman had stated that she had caught a glimpse of the animal as it came to the attack. I have reached the conclusion that the wounds must have been caused by a claw attack from behind the woman's back.

The wounds were exactly what I would have expected to see from the claws of a lion or a leopard. I could not imagine that a hyena could have caused them, even should a hyena

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use its feet in some way when making an attack. Nor could I think of any other possible animal.

It has been suggested that an obvious solution of the whole business is that the attack was made by a leopard-man, who had dressed himself in a leopard's skin and worn some kind of gloves armed with metal spikes resembling a leopard's claws. This solution I reject completely. Although such practices are not uncommonly reported among leopard societies in the forest near the coast of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, they are unheard of in the inland savannah areas of West Africa and their witchcraft and organised murder are unthinkable in the Frafra country. In any case, had disguise or a weapon been used, I can see no reason why it should not have been found and produced. A discarded leopard-skin would have been wonderful proof of the truth of the witnesses' story. But no human fingers, with or without some weapon or metal aid, could have caused those terrible diverging gashes.

THE identity of the animal which made the attack on the woman—if it is agreed that it was an animal—is puzzling. The likeness to a long low brown donkey is possibly not an unreasonable general description of the size and colour of an unknown animal. The wide red mouth spoken of sounds like a lion or a leopard, but the short tail could belong to nothing but a hyena. The consistency of the donkey-like feet is strange, and it may be noted that there were always four of them. Although Frafras are not particularly well acquainted with wild animals, practically all of them would have seen, and would recognise, a hyena. Some would have seen live leopards, and most would be familiar with leopard-skins and with their representation in art. Many would have seen a dead leopard proudly displayed by a hunter. Lions are uncommon and known only by general description. Neither a baboon nor any other animal found in this northern savannah area seems to fit the picture.

The hyena is a nocturnal beast and I have

never heard of one being seen at midday, least of all in a populated area. Hyenas are reputed occasionally to carry off children at night: but for one to make an unprovoked attack on an adult in full daylight is out of the question. I have considered the hyena merely because it is one of the very few animals of the correct size and because the short tail described seems to fit no other beast. A leopard or, much more improbably, the uncommon lion seems to be the most likely culprit. But there is no explanation as to why a leopard should have been in this populated area in the daytime nor why it should make an unprovoked attack on a person. A leopard's natural reaction to the presence of human beings is to slip away unobserved. Although it is a little surprising that it had not been seen and chased away earlier in the day, there was nothing to suggest that it had now been cornered and thereby provoked to attack.

Let us assume, nevertheless, that it was a leopard which had attacked the woman. How and when had the human body appeared? The evidence identifying the attacker of the woman with the dead human body was clear and simple. When I visited Gamboruno I was taken over the line of the chase by some of the participants. The distance of four hundred and fifty yards ran first of all across groundnut farms and thereafter, for the greater part of the way, over short grass. At its maximum growth this grass was about eighteen inches high and the statement of the witness who said that as the animal ran away the grass just reached its belly seemed likely to have been an accurate one. The chase had not gone near to any of the corn, nor was there any ditch or other natural cover on the way. The start and the finish were in sight of each other.

The injured woman and the body of the man beaten to death were real objects which I saw with my own eyes. The accounts of the eye-witnesses connecting the two were, I am sure, believed by each of them to be true. Some kind of mass hallucination there must have been. But just where the flaw occurred in the account of what happened—though I have my own idea—must remain a mystery.

The King of the Christmas-Trees

AUSTIN EDWARDS

WHAT colour do you like your Christmas-trees? A ridiculous question, surely, you may say, as whoever saw a Christmas-tree any other colour but green, excepting, perhaps, in some fanciful advertising display? In Europe, yes: in Britain, quite so. But in America there is a big demand for gay, glamorous coloured trees, and a demand that has been met by a man and his wife in Minnesota, with a service that now ranks as big business in the United States.

Roy Halvorson, one-time tomato salesman, used-car dealer, and part-time dance-band musician, has, with the active assistance of his wife Edythe, built up a Christmas-tree empire within the space of twenty-five years—an empire that involves thousands of acres of growing-grounds, and harvests of millions of trees, all backed by careful planning and organisation.

Halvorson now harvests, processes, and sells more Christmas-trees than anyone else in the world and, though now a prosperous man, he can yet look back on years of hard slogging, tinged with a modicum of disappointment, before he attained his success. It is an absorbingly-interesting story, and one that for purposes of this chronicle begins nearly forty years ago.

ROY HALVORSON'S boyhood and youth followed the pattern of most American lads of his type and status. A native of Duluth in the State of Minnesota, Roy attended high school in the town before winning a scholarship to the Duluth Military Academy, where he graduated in 1923. Thereafter, a year in the State Teachers' College at Superior was followed by five years filling a variety of jobs—fruit and vegetable salesman and motor salesman and used-car dealer amongst them, whilst in the evenings he

augmented his income by playing the saxophone in a local dance-band. Actually, it was during his career as a musician that he met Edythe, who became his wife and business partner—which leads us on to Christmas-trees again.

Throughout his somewhat varied early business career Halvorson kept musing upon an idea retained since his boyhood days. Along with other lads of his age in Minnesota he had been used to visiting the woods each December and cutting Christmas-trees to earn some extra pocket-money. Eventually he had come to terms with an older man to deal in trees on a more or less business-partnership footing. But Roy's partner would insist on cutting big trees, whilst the younger lad figured that the public taste was for smaller trees. That his ideas were correct was later proved up to the hilt, but that first venture in the marketing of trees only ended up in a dissolution of the partnership.

Roy's idea was that smaller trees were easier to produce, easier to transport, to display, and to store, and that they looked nice anyway. His marriage to Edythe in 1925 saw the newly-weds put those ideas to the practical test by running a part-time Christmas-tree business from the basement of their home. In the evenings and at week-ends Roy would visit the local woods where, in the swamp-like ground of Minnesota, the black spruce grew in profusion.

Home he would bring his trees, and the pair spent night after night trimming the treelets and getting them ready for Christmas. Roy produced a form of wooden base in which to insert the tree ready for sale—and then, after all their labour, the thermometer climbed to an unseasonably high level for mid-December, and the needles fell! From having a large collection of apparently saleable Christmas-trees, the Halvorsons found they merely had a

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cellarful of needles and about 2000 dried-out trees!

Obviously that sort of thing was useless, but instead of throwing up the whole idea in despair Roy Halvorson got down to a study of ways of keeping the trees fresh until required. He experimented with various chemicals and fluids with varying success. The bathroom became a laboratory, the bath an experimental tank, and eventually by trial and error a substance was devised that would keep the trees fresh and make them resistant to fire.

Success did not occur all at once, of course, but once a process had been devised that would keep the trees fresh in a warm atmosphere for a week or more, and which would prevent the shedding of their needles, the Halvorsons were ready to launch out again.

with needles that don't fall off, and in a variety of colours if desired, are ready each year for the shops—when the shops require them. For, after preparation and mounting in the Halvorson factory, the trees are packed in cartons of one dozen and placed in giant cold-storage rooms where a temperature of between 20 and 25 degrees Fahrenheit is maintained. Here they stay for anything up to eight months before the Christmas season, and so anyone buying a Halvorson tree is literally buying one 'off the ice', one, moreover, that will, after unpacking, be fresh and gay for anything up to another three months. Whilst in cold storage, the synthetic preserving-fluid remains dormant, of course, but it immediately begins its work of nourishing the tree when exposure to the warm air is made.

THIS was in 1929. Roy gave up his job as a car-salesman, where he was earning the equivalent of about £8, 10s. a week, which was useful remuneration in those days, and embarked on a new career with his wife as full-time Christmas-tree producers. They laid their plans well this time, lining-up wholesale grocery firms and produce and commission brokers as their selling-agents, whilst the set-up in the fields and forests was planned on a similar comprehensive scale.

They had planned wisely. Sizable orders flowed in from the wholesalers, and Roy and Edythe were well and truly in business. They did not, however, just sit back. Wisely they sought to improve their product and developed a colouring agent that would impart a variety of gay glamorous hues to the erstwhile dullish colour of the Minnesota spruce.

This was indeed a strong additional selling-point, but an even more important factor was the discovery of 'Liquid Life'—a fluid that could be absorbed into the trunks of the trees, and which would help to maintain their freshness for a period of between one and three months, dependent upon the temperature and humidity of the rooms in which they were placed. It was quickly found possible to apply this vital fluid to every Halvorson tree by fitting each into a conical metal base containing a supply of this secret preservative.

So now, with 'Chemi-colour', a waxy emulsion-paint which keeps the trees fresh, on the outside, and the 'Liquid Life' preservative on the inside, the Halvorson trees, perfectly-proportioned, thickly-branched little trees,

BUT what about the raw materials of this unique business—the trees themselves? The State of Minnesota, with its millions of acres of bog and swampy land, is perfect territory for growing the black spruces which are ideal for the Halvorson brand of tree. This boggy land is a relic of the Ice Age, having come into being after thousands of years of oxidation of weed-growth. Nothing much apart from black spruce will grow there, but where these trees are found they are indeed prolific—anything up to four thousand trees to the acre.

We know from experience in Britain that indiscriminate cutting can be disastrous to forest growth, but the Halvorson organisation do things efficiently. Halvorson Trees Inc. owns 11,000 acres in their home state, and another 60,000 or so acres are leased on contract from the State or Federal Governments. A team of full-time trained foresters works closely with the Forestry Conservation authority, and each summer Roy, in his own plane, makes an aerial survey of the likeliest cutting areas for the next year.

Checks of usable trees are made on the ground, and cutting really gets under way in September and is a major undertaking. Teams of up to 200 men reside on the job whilst the cutting operations proceed, and the trees—only the thick, green upper parts are used—are made into bundles of twelve and loaded on to swamp-sleds, which, in turn, are towed by giant tractors across the bogs to the main roads, and so to the Halvorson factory.

These spruce forests are composed of trees mostly seventy-five years old or older. At the

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top they grow thick and green where the sunlight reaches them, but below, where it is nearly always dusk, the lower branches die off. It is, as has been said, the rich green upper part that is required, and cutting is done on a rotation system that provides that only about five per cent of the trees are cut at any one time. Thus it is ensured that just sufficient sunlight is admitted to the forest to stimulate the growth of the remaining trees.

And so to the Duluth factory. After being trimmed to a uniform size of 36 inches high, the trees go through the preservative chemical bath, are coloured as desired, dried, and the butts dowelled to fit the metal base, which contains the 'Liquid Life'—and then into the cold-store. Dispatches to the shops begin in November, and Roy Halvorson begins planning for another year. Cutting begins again in February and continues until May, then is suspended for the three hottest months, when the trees are budding and the mosquitoes are rife.

In the past quarter of a century this American king of the Christmas-trees has harvested about 13,000,000 acres of wilderness. To do this he has constructed over 1000 miles of road for his tractors, 3500 miles of survey-lines, and 9000 miles of forest-trails. Nearly all these communication ways have been cut either in straight or in cardinal directions.

Last year over 1,000,000 Halvorson trees were sold in America—shops and stores in all forty-eight States of the Union handle them—

and this colossal figure is now the minimum anticipated annual output. The coloured trees are most pleasing to the eye, and people prefer the Halvorson green to the natural yellow-brown colouring. Seventy per cent of last year's sales were in green; twenty per cent were silver; and ten per cent were white.

THIS Halvorson enterprise is a real happy husband-and-wife partnership. Roy supervises the forest operations and field planning. Edythe is the commercial and distribution manager. They have two children, June and Tommy, and the family lives in an ultra-modern home which overlooks Lake Superior. The house bristles with every kind of mechanical, electronic, and labour-saving gadget, many of them Roy's own ideas. It has been described as 'an engineer's dream', and gives its owner full scope for his inventive flare, and, as he says, special-purpose machines have helped to make his business a success—now they also help to make his home life pleasant too.

A far cry indeed from the newly-married young car-salesman who had an idea, tried it out and failed, but was not deterred. In a unique way Roy and Edythe Halvorson have proved the truth of Emerson's dictum about the world beating a path to one's door. In this case they didn't build their house in the woods—they built their business and their prosperity from the product of the woods themselves.

Kitchen Elves

*I often think of kitchen shelves
As hiding hosts of impish elves,
That spring upon you, one by one,
Disguised as jobs that must be done:
The sink to scour, the floor to scrub;
Silver to clean, and brass to rub;
The tea to set, the washing-up—
Another plate, another cup—
The coal to bring, the fire to make,
The meat to cook, a cake to bake;
They follow one another fast,
Till time for bed brings peace at last—
Oh, all you horrid kitchen elves,
Why don't you do these jobs yourselves?*

ELIZABETH FLEMING.



The Odd Familiar

ALUN LLEWELLYN

THE case of Daio's leprachaun (said the shepherd) is well known to those that know it—which is a good enough definition of any sort of fame. Our own native Welsh pucks and lobs seem to have retired from supernatural practice these many years and settled down to be indistinguishable from them that conduct our public affairs from day to day. But this leprachaun was a sort of invisible import, and for example of the uproar that affects human businesses when an original spirit enters them you need go no further than the tale I have to tell of Daio Cwmpen-Top.

Cwmpen-Top, as you will suppose, is a farm, being a place remote in a green valley, hidden in hills where no roads run that you could detect as roads—which maybe explains why the leprachaun happened there rather than in some place better favoured.

Daio was a man between youth and middle-age; it was not easy to tell to which he belonged, for he had youth in his face but disillusion in his habits, his farm being scanty and short-handed and he without wife or stock to speak of, so that care sat on him and tribulation possessed his mind—particularly when he thought of Susan Ty-Moch, whom poverty did not properly permit him to think of at all. So dry and ambitionless he lived, self-denying and miserly, scraping money with

little purpose, since he could never get so much as Tom Town-Dealer or have half his chances with Susan—at least, so far as Tom Town-Dealer told him, for it was part of Daio's deficiencies that the discipline of his self-denials had grown more than halfway into self-approval and he preferred not to ask Susan's opinion.

But when a tramping Irish labourer came knocking at his door one night, to offer to help with the hay as these Irish do, Daio gave him crust and cup and bed. And when he had gone, that evening as Daio was at his lonely table, he found sitting on it a little man.

It was a stealthy night and the flame of the oil-lamp stood up straight with surprise, as indeed did the hair on Daio's head, for one moment the little man had not been there, and the next, there he was, half-a-foot high, if that, and comfortable, with one leg cocked over a knee, on a crust of bread.

There was nothing in Daio's glass to account for it, for buttermilk was his drink. Nor was the little man outrageous in demeanour, being dressed in a black jacket with striped trousers and a soft black hat like a politician.

'I am a leprachaun,' said the little man, taking off his hat, dignified.

'Good evening,' said Daio with circumspection.

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'I must offer you some credentials,' said the leprachaun. 'I came over with the Irish tramp you took in. My profession in Ireland is overcrowded and my ideas don't have the scope they deserve. It seemed to me this was the best place to make a new start. And I assure you the Irishman did not even know I was with him.'

'That is strange,' said Daio. 'I should have thought he had some responsibility for you.'

'Not at all,' the leprachaun told him, severely. 'His haversack was convenient, but I only make myself visible when I choose—which was useful at Customs.'

'You do not look like a leprachaun,' objected Daio, feeling it was time some good sense edged into the conversation. 'And if you are, then I have no use for you. You will sell me a crock of fairy gold, and when I have it, it will turn to a handful of dry leaves.'

'On the contrary,' said the leprachaun, as if he was insulted. 'I work on quite different lines. I give you a handful of dry leaves, here and now, and before I have done with you you shall see them turn to a pot of bright clean gold.'

It was then that the leprachaun began to look to Daio less like a politician than a travelling salesman, if morally we can suppose there is a difference, for Daio, as I have said, had no illusions, since the misfortunes of his life led him to think nothing was to be trusted, and to put any kind of credence in a thing like a leprachaun was to tax his abilities out of existence. And yet this leprachaun was plainly before him, both visible and audible, which destroyed all Daio's confidence in his own judgment. So the upshot was he agreed to take the leprachaun on trial as his familiar, the little man asking for nothing but a good supply of buttermilk and guaranteeing to turn Daio's fortunes upside down inside six months, which Daio did not greatly believe, but the leprachaun would be company and would cost next to nothing. And the handful of leaves went into the tobacco-jar. They were just the sort of leaves, too, that a man can smoke—*baco trepyll*, as we say—which was all the use Daio expected to get from them, as he pointed out to the little man. Then they regarded each other for a while.

'It is the way you are dressed I can't get over,' said Daio. 'It is odd that a being so unusual should look so customary.'

'An apparition,' said the leprachaun, 'has to be careful of appearances.'

There was logic in this, as Daio had to admit, so he closed his mouth and made no more objections.

NOW, it was sale day in town the next morning, as it happened, and early Daio started off, the leprachaun sitting on his shoulder, plain for Daio to see, though invisible to anyone else. The little man explained it to Daio with care, and they tried it out on the sheep-dog, who was indifferent enough to the leprachaun to convince Daio.

'But I ought to explain,' Daio said, 'that for me to take you to market, you being there without being there at all, you might say, is against my principles. I have always lived sparing and honest and open and unconcealing and never went to market yet with anything but hard cash in my pocket and hard facts in my mind.'

'It is a sorry sort of man,' the leprachaun reminded him, 'who does not think he needs reforming.'

He had a solemnity of reply that always silenced Daio, so to town they went, the leprachaun discoursing on the beauties of the countryside and leaning against Daio's ear and encouraging him as they got into the streets and walked among the crowd. Not that this made Daio any the less embarrassed, for the way he held his neck stiff caused a deal of inquiry, and the way he said words from time to time out of the corner of his mouth to no one in particular raised speculations that were various and unflattering, Tom Town-Dealer being much to the fore in comment, which annoyed the leprachaun, and he asked Daio to be less awkward.

'I can't believe that what I see others are blind to,' whispered Daio, red in the face.

'You're the only man here who doesn't flatter himself that way,' said the leprachaun, looking round the standings of the auction-shed with disapproval. 'There isn't one of them who won't tell you he can see further through a brick wall than the rest, particularly that Tom Town-Dealer, whom I do not like. Well, let us see how far their business acumen leads them.'

And no sooner had Daio's few sheep been set for auction than the leprachaun slipped from his shoulders to the shoulders of this one and that and put up the bidding, till Daio did not know whether to be more ashamed of the deceit or dumbfounded with admiration

THE ODD FAMILIAR

at the way the buyers went after the price like sheep themselves.

'Mass-psychology,' said the leprachaun, jumping back on Daio's shoulders, mopping his brow. 'What they call *bulling the market*, I believe. I use modern methods; they beat the old magic any day. Now for your own bidding.'

There was no stopping or commanding him. He began calling in Daio's voice, over-reaching all comers, till half the stock in the auction was knocked down to him. It was no use for Daio to attempt protest, as attempt he did. Every time he opened his mouth in indignation and despair the auctioneer nodded sidelong and took it as a signal to send up the price higher, till Daio fell dumb with consternation, and so did everyone else, and what was left in the place went to the leprachaun at his first call.

Now Tom Town-Dealer and the auctioneer and each man there knew Daio's pocket to be what it was, so that consternation dropped into silence, and silence grew into an atmosphere of interrogation, and Daio stood in the midst of it with the unseen leprachaun on his shoulder and his eyes bursting with disbelief at himself. The crowd gathered close and their disbelief was as considerable, but much more elaborate.

'You have bought a great deal,' said Tom Town-Dealer, slowly feeling his way, for the situation was too unexpected to be credible, and yet too incredible not to be believed, if you can follow me.

'Me!' shouted Daio, full of moral indignation. 'Do you think it was me that bought them?' There was half-a-minute of reflection and then a nodding of heads all round. So Tom Town-Dealer asked him quiet to take a drink, and to the Cross Pipes the whole crowd went, and Daio sat in perspiration with glasses in a circle all round him.

'I see it,' said Tom Town-Dealer, putting his head on one side and laying a finger to his nose. 'You have gone into partnership.'

'That is so,' answered the leprachaun, and there he was before them all, sitting with his legs crossed on an upturned whisky-glass, calm and business-like. 'And his partner is me.'

'He is a leprachaun!' Daio warned them, desperate; but at this they all laughed, for the leprachaun, though a little undersized, was too well dressed to be mistaken for something out of nature. And moreover he was

free with his money, calling for drinks all round and paying for them with what Daio could see were fistfuls of dried leaves, but which the whole place took as bank-notes, so that, what with the drink and the sight of money, before long Tom Town-Dealer had bought back all Daio's cattle from him, and Daio, too much dazed to consider his principles, pocketed a good sum as profit without having spent a penny. Tom made an offer for the leprachaun, too, thinking it was some dwarf from a fair with a good business head. But the little man chose to vanish again at that point and it was no use for Daio to try to explain the thing for what it was. Every one congratulated him on his wit, and the leprachaun's dry leaves fluttered like snow over the bar counter. It was a sight that stirred Daio so much, between his false position and his self-respect, that he went home in some upheaval of temper.

'BUT there was no deception at all,' said the leprachaun as they sat at table together. 'A bargain is a bargain. You told them what I was and they disbelieved you and backed their own judgment. Put your money away in the tobacco-jar. You take paper and they take dry leaves. What's the difference, after all? Both sides believe in what they've got. That is the meaning of fiduciary issue, isn't it? When you come to think of it, fairy gold is as solid as most forms of wealth, neither less nor more.'

'Which may be logic,' agreed Daio. 'You have a deal of logic about you. But there's law to be considered, too, apart from morality.'

'You can't expect me,' said the leprachaun, waving a hand, lofty, 'to admit any laws except those proper to my kind. We leprachauns only exist by way of mythology, which puts us on a par with most things in human politics, currency and credit included. Indeed, I often think it is we fairies who are substantial and you humans who are creatures of imagination, for we are the masters of illusion and you are the slaves of it.' But seeing Daio still sombre, he examined him for a while with his chin in his hand.

'You have no illusions, Daio,' said he. 'There is your trouble and what makes you unhuman. Illusions may be folly, but they are always hope, and without that all the money you may get is no more than so many dry leaves. I am here to teach you the value

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of it. Believe me who am an immortal and must therefore be for ever beyond the reach of hope. Maybe, if you can get a few illusions some other way, I can leave you. But that is for you to decide for yourself. And in the meantime, I could do with some butter-milk.' After which, he fell asleep in a wicker skip and Daio sat by the fire, pondering.

Daio thought of the money he had got, and how he had got it; and he thought of Susan Ty-Moch and how Tom Town-Dealer was after her. And it gradually got into his mind that the leprachaun maybe had some subtler basis of morality than mere denials of self could supply, for he weighed the value of the money he had not had and wanted against the thing he had wanted but would not ask for without the money. Then he put on his boots, cautious as he could, so as not to wake the fairy, and went to find Susan, and told her everything.

'If it was not you,' she said, 'there is nothing of it I would believe. But I am coming to your house now to see this leprachaun of yours. I do not trust you in his hands.'

It was no use for Daio to say the little man meant well.

'When we are married,' said Susan, 'I cannot have competition like that about the place.'

Now Daio had said nothing of marrying, and thought it proper to point out he was not worthy of her, at which Susan laughed and said he could think so if he chose.

So together they went through the evening back to Daio's farm. And he stood in the door and called: 'Leprachaun! Leprachaun!' But there was no answer, for the creature may have guessed that when Susan walked in with Daio there was a stronger illusion between them and a more lasting one than any he could contrive. So he had gone. And they looked into the tobacco-jar—and it was filled with clean, bright gold.

'It would have been there before,' said Susan, 'if you had believed sooner in yourself and in me.'

But how anyone explained the handfuls of dried oak-leaves stuffed into the till of the Cross Pipes I have never learned.

Quicker Reading

WILFRED ALTMAN

IT is a curious thing that scientific research has not been devoted to discovering methods of speedier reading—at least in Britain.

If tests were made of our reading-speeds, it is doubtful whether the average adult would be found to exceed a rate of 250 words a minute.

Yet to-day everyone—schoolboy, secretary, housewife, professional man, tradesman, or technician—has decidedly more paper work to cope with than people had fifty years ago. Nor has there ever been a time when we have had such a host of publications offered by the bookstalls. What a boon to us all, there-

fore, if it were possible to read more quickly!

Nevertheless, the fact remains that nothing seems to have been done in this country towards quicker reading. In America, however, research workers have now found that, with training and practice, reading-speeds can be increased by 100 per cent—and more!

An incidental discovery was that fast readers usually scored higher in comprehension tests than did slow readers. Further, the research team found, also, that most Americans read no better than they did in elementary schools—simply because of there being little training in reading after school-leaving.

QUICKER READING

THE problem of speedier reading was first seriously thought about during the last war. Then techniques had to be evolved to train men in the rapid identification of enemy aircraft and ships. As a result of this successful experience, better-reading schools were founded to serve the American public. Two of the best-known of these schools are the Reading Laboratory of New York and the Chicago Foundation for Better Reading.

Both schools can claim some astonishing results. The Reading Laboratory, for example enrolled a man who, before starting the course, had already read books on faster reading and could read texts of average complexity at the rate of 460 words a minute. At the end of twenty-one hours of practice and instruction he was reading the same kind of material at 1230 words a minute!

This was a phenomenal case. Nevertheless, the school claims that 92 per cent of the people who have taken the training provided have at least doubled their reading-speed, while the rest have tripled or quadrupled it.

To achieve these results, the better-reading schools use a number of mechanical devices. For instance, the Reading Laboratory first analyses reading skill with the aid of an ophthalmograph, a machine which records eye movement. Then a tachistoscope is used to flash numbers on a screen, starting with five digits at one-tenth of a second and progressing to seven digits at one-hundredth. The latter instrument is used for sharpening eye responses.

Another machine aims to increase eye-span. It starts with phrases of fifteen letters flashed at one one-hundredth of a second and culminates with phrases of twenty-five to thirty letters.

The last of the devices is a reading accelerator. This moves a screen down a page of reading matter at constantly faster speeds until a student's top speed is reached.

THESE mechanical devices are clearly an important part of the training—helping to sharpen the outer vision of the eyes. But the same benefits can be achieved, to a lesser degree, by the average reader by self-effort. Anyone can learn to read faster by practising the following rules laid down by experts.

The most important rule is to learn how to pre-read. This is the practice of glancing quickly over what you are going to read for an indication of the actual contents. Chapter

headings, subtitles, lines printed in heavier type—all material set off from the text—provide good clues. They also prepare the mind for absorbing the details of a text.

Having mastered the art of pre-reading, the next step is to try to take in more words at a glance. One way to do this is to focus one's eyes above the line of type. This is probably the basic step in improving reading speed and comprehension. A good reader makes fewer pauses because he absorbs phrases and thought units at a glance instead of reading word by word. In fact it is easier, according to the reading experts, for the brain to interpret phrases or thought-units than to make sense of disconnected words.

The next step is to develop rhythm in reading, and to get into the habit of making no more than three or four pauses per line, then letting the eyes move across and down a page with the regularity of a typewriter carriage. If you can do this, you are well on the way to becoming a good reader.

Everyone is apt to reread sometimes, either because the meaning is not clear the first time, or because the passage is rather striking in its phrasing or content, or because some words are not known. This is a habit which must be discarded quickly. Developing the practice of absorbing more and more words at a glance will gradually eliminate the need to go back to what has already been read.

Another important rule for increasing reading-speeds is to widen one's vocabulary. Efficient reading implies a working knowledge of some twenty to thirty thousand words. Not understanding a word can make one miss the meaning of a sentence or paragraph. It is also one of the most frequent causes of the habit of rereading.

Recognising clichés and trite phrases—and skipping them—is the next stage. Material of the better quality will be free from worn-out phrases, but it is a fact that much that is written consists of such phrases. Learn how to get hold of the more important parts.

The final rule is just to concentrate on reading faster, by freeing the mind of all tendencies to wander and guarding it from all outside distractions. To do this, say the American experts, recognise your purpose in reading the material in front of you; learn to question what you are reading and to relate yourself to it.

Most adults stand to benefit by practising these rules. You are probably one of them.

Twice-Told Tales

LX.—Boarding-House Cheerful Party

[From *Chambers's Journal* of December 1855]

BY the simple but unerring process of resigning myself to the subordinate part of a good listener, I soon became the most popular of characters. Ladies made room for me on conversation-chairs when I entered the drawing-room, and gentlemen shared my sherry after dinner with the frankest confidence. Mrs Heaviland, when she gave a soirée, consulted me on almost every detail, from the trimming of Fanny's white *areophane* (grand-niece number one) to the most dignified mode of excluding the 'well-informed woman'—with whom war was to the knife—from participation therein. The latter lady never gave notice to quit, which it was her custom to do once, at least, in every three weeks, without consulting me upon the diction of that document, in order to its due legal formality; a confidence which possessed some compensating advantage in the greater facility it afforded for the composition of the reply, upon which the lady of the house was invariably good enough to desire my opinion. Mrs Livingstone honoured me with considerably more of her confidence than she was in the habit of bestowing upon society in general, and conversed with me at dinner in the French language in the most engaging manner. For the latter compliment, however, I fancied I was rather indebted to her desire to aggravate the 'large-patterned lady', who was not conversant with that tongue, and with whom, being in alliance, offensive and defensive, with the 'well-informed woman', she was not on terms. Mr Crosbie Hall soon ceased to hold up his voice before me, even upon the 'intentions of government'; I began, without apprehension, to correct Mr O'Shannon upon the rentals of the aristocracy; and there were not wanting those who pronounced my *deux temps* superior even to that of the count himself.

Greatness, however, I gradually began to discover, has its cares as well as its privileges;

and even the post of honour of *enfant chéri* of a Cheerful Party is not without its drawbacks. Strange to say, however, doubts began now to rise in my mind whether the Cheerful Party was a Cheerful Party at all. 'Musical' it might be, but harmonious it certainly was not. It was far more suggestive to me of a modern House of Commons, or any other combination of incongruous elements of contradictive habits and separate interests; and heartily was I tempted to denounce the fatal hour that witnessed my installation as a member of it. Had I not to bargain for long sixpenny-fares for Mrs Heaviland, whose pet parsimony was coach-hire, until, as I am an honest man, I was obliged to go a quarter of a mile round in my walks to avoid the humours of the cab-stand! Was not I compelled to listen, by the hour together, to Miss Starchey's comments upon her friends' characters, with the certainty that if I differed, I should be the next victim myself, and if I did not, should have them fathered upon me the next day as my own! Were not my good offices being perpetually called into requisition as a peace-officer, to keep the young widow from coming to a battle-royal with the old one, in which—for the latter possessed a keen eye and a sharp tongue, and the former perhaps a rather valetudinarian reputation—she would be certain to be worsted! For which of my sins was I condemned to have my purse and patience nightly tested by the count's miraculous successions of trump-cards; and the anecdotes which the descendant of the Irish prophet was in the practice of improvising as his own from the *Annual Registers*! What had I done that Mr Crosbie Hall should take it into his head—for no other reason, I believe, than my distraction—to fall in love with the young widow, and murder my rest by smoking his pipe for two hours on my bed every other evening, to ask me what I thought of his chances!



Music for Strings

J. F. HENDRY

AS he was returning home from work Tino saw a violin in a shop and bought it, thinking he would be able to play it. He did not want his wife to find out, so he had to smuggle it into the house. This was not easy. To enter the flat you went through an alley into an old coaching-yard, then up a flight of stairs, curving round to the left, and along the wall, looking down into the garden. You could therefore easily be seen all the way, even by the neighbours, for the whole structure resembled a Spanish patio. Tino thrust the instrument under his jacket, and found that the bow went down his back quite readily.

Although there were no horses now in the cobbled yard, but only a painter's workshop, with its little blue sign outside saying: VIDALI PITTORE, there was usually a crowd of people lounging about at the door. Vidali was a good landscape-painter, but nobody bought pictures, and he had to spend his time covering walls with undecorative paint instead, reserving his more serious artistic moments for the privacy of his own home.

Tino walked through. For once no one was there, and he edged upstairs to the landing above, which was always green with plants, and then along the railings. Flowers lined the window-sills, screening him from those

inside. Flowers had been there when he left to go to Germany, and they were still there when he arrived back. They seemed to be the same ones. They had remained there for years, and they were as green as ever. He noticed these things, but no one else seemed interested.

Passing his own door, he peeped into the kitchen. His wife was bent over the stove. On tiptoe he sped upstairs to the room they used as an attic. There he deposited the violin in a large trunk, in which were also a gramophone and a number of comic papers.

INNOCENTLY then Tino came down, and stood at the door of the house, watching Pina. The room they lived in contained, in addition to the stove, a large bed, an empty radio-cabinet, a lurid purple and green holy picture, and a wardrobe. The cabinet looked good sitting against the wall. It did not matter that it could not play. Tino knew that though other houses had radio-cabinets, when you went in they weren't playing. They couldn't be playing all the time, and when they weren't they looked just like his own empty cabinet. 'Oh, so there you are!' his wife said, looking up. 'Lunch is nearly ready.'

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He smiled at her. He still did not seem to be home. Only twelve months before, he had been in Germany. Standing at the door for a moment, he saw, not Pina, but the framed picture of his father and mother, sister and brother, seated at table, staring up at him as if discovered in their guilt, appalled at what they might find in his face when he returned. They were afraid before they were glad, since terror was what they had learned to expect before joy. Only when they were melted by his assurance did they come forward out of the still to take his hand, put their arms around him, lead him to a chair, and pour him out some wine. 'Where have you been, Tino?' they asked. 'Where have you been?' He smiled. He did not know where he had been. He had never been so important as when he had been uprooted by human catastrophe.

'Come in and sit down,' Pina said, and he walked in.

Secretly he felt very happy. Everything it seemed had happened to him at once. On the way home from Germany after the war he had met Pina at a farm. In a year they were married and Walter was born. He had rented a field with potatoes, and a vineyard. 'Have you been down to the garden?' Pina asked. She called it that, because it was at the back of a house, but it was a vineyard.

Frowning, he said: 'I-I'm going down in the afternoon.'

'How are the grapes?' she asked, knowing that it was difficult for Tino to look after the place himself.

'Fine,' he said, 'fine. W-wait till you see the wine we'll get!'

'It had better be nicer than last year,' she said, 'when you spoilt it by putting it into an old barrel!'

'Oh, it will be,' he said. 'We might s-sell some of it. And you should see the pumpkins. They're enormous!'

'Pumpkins? I didn't know you had any.'

'Neither did I. They're growing through the wire-netting, on my side of the fence, and they're so big they can't get back through!'

'Good,' she said. 'Eat your soup, then, and get back to work.'

Pina was really fond of her husband, even if she had married him only because he had threatened to kill himself if she did not. Something wasted in his glance, something utterly hopeless, and yet resigned and kind, made her feel drawn to him in spite of herself.

Silently he supped his soup. When it was finished, he looked at her curiously and said: 'Are you going to your sister's to-night again?'

'Yes,' she replied. 'Why? You know I go every Saturday.'

'Oh, nothing.'

After his coffee Tino rose and went out again without a word. Pina looked after him as he went, wondering if anything was the matter. It was very hard sometimes to understand what went on in Tino's mind.

ALL afternoon Tino thought about the violin and about the music that was locked up in it. There was music locked up inside him too.

'Pile it up here,' the foreman said.

Tino looked up and the tower of the Cathedral struck him with high belfries of copper and flashing domes of brass. It flapped five pigeons at him and drummed a bell, stirring deep waters in his soul.

'What are you staring at?' the foreman asked. 'Did you hear what I said?'

Tino put the pail down and wiped the sweat from his brow, for it was very hot. You could feel the heat approaching, miles off, weeks off, across the sea and the mountains. You could feel it swelling like a sail, and everything swelling with it like music, and beginning to grow again.

He was helping to cement-wash the church across the way from the house, fetching and carrying the pails through the square to where it shone like a lighthouse in his eyes. As the chime of bells fell over him in waves, he felt that it was like a whole orchestra of violins, playing in the sun. Even the sky was, too, for the sound of a violin he had heard once touched him like the grasp of ice. That sounded silly, but it was not so, although he had forgotten that the sky was such an icy, emerald blue as it appeared to him behind the church. For a moment he blinked, swimming for a second in the lake of the sun, then picked up his pail again. Crossing the square he was happy. It was as if the flecks on his trousers even were flecks of sun.

He would, he decided, play the violin that evening as soon as he returned home. There would be no one to hear his first attempt, but there would be plenty of time for them to hear him later on.

Above him a flag fluttered from the Castello, and to him it became the fort he had never

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had in his childhood. On its prow of rock it was a ship sailing through time. It had always been there, when he was small, after the first war, coming back from Skofja Loka, where he had almost died, lending solidity and permanence to his life. He knew he was safe when he saw it again after the second war, on his return from Germany.

In the distance he could see the mountains on the horizon like great broody hens, and others, nearer, like proud, sharp birds.

Once he had wanted to be a sacristan, so much did he like the church music. As a sacristan, too, none of his peculiarities would have been very noticeable. His parents had encouraged him in this direction, thinking it best for the boy. Though he had worked with the monks, however, it did not seem to have occurred to anyone to suggest that he would make a good sacristan, and he had left the company of the friars for the city.

Now he was entirely without ambition. He did not want to be able to paint the walls, or to be allowed to stand on the scaffolding. It did not come into his mind that if he planned and schemed he might one day have a shop of his own. Carrying a pail in the sunshine, at the beck and call of anyone who wanted any odd work done, was quite enough to occupy him. He had, besides, Pina. What else should he want? Except, perhaps, music?

The gramophone was one attempt at providing that, though he had no needles for it. The violin would be better, he had no doubt. He was lucky to have found it, but then he was lucky to have found Pina. He and Pina were lucky they had been able to convince his parents that it was better for them to get married right away. He knew they did not think he was quite 'right'. They thought it wrong of him to marry, wrong, too, for him to marry her.

AT five o'clock Tino walked down to the garden, from which could be seen the great bulk of Nanos in the distance, shrouded always in mist and snow, to attend to the vines. Soon it would be time for the vintage, and then they would be tapping the wine, and he would be surrounded by friends. That, perhaps, was the aim of his wine-making, though he confided in no one. All the houses he passed on the way were pink or blue, or yellow or green. He liked their colours,

which absorbed the sun, and he promised himself that one day he, too, would live in a coloured house.

The garden, when he went in, was full of slugs. They wriggled through the pears, and writhed on the cabbage and lettuce. Tino did not even see them. He saw only the trees laden magically with fruit, and the vines covering themselves inevitably with grapes, and walked about the grass under them, bowing his head now and then to avoid a low branch. Here he was the *proprietario*.

The figs and the olives needed spraying and pruning, but he looked on everything from a childish point of view. If somehow something came up, it was due to his care. If the whole garden were ultimately choked by pests and drought, or inclement weather, why then it would be up to him to do something about it, dig, perhaps, or plant here and there. Thrusting a bunch of grapes into his pocket, he relocked the gate and made his way home. At any other time, perhaps, he might have stayed until dark, rearranging strips, or pulling out a few weeds, but to-night was the night when Pina left the house empty, and he wanted to finger the violin he had bought in the morning.

Only his mother was at home, in the flat below. He put the grapes on her table. Without looking, she made a deprecatory sound. Then she saw how small they were. 'Not even ripe again!' she cried. 'Can't you see what other people see, Tino? Why must your grapes always be small and sour? Your wine is sour, too. Why are you content with less than others?'

'It—it'll be different this year, you'll see,' he said.

He saw himself dispensing wine in the courtyard at the end of the summer. He was behind a counter formed of planks from Vidali's, and all their friends were crowding round to get a glass of the lovely wine he himself had grown. When they were all slightly tipsy, he would draw out the violin casually, and play a few chords on it, silencing them. 'Come on,' they would shout. 'Play us a dance-tune, Tino!' and he would break into a lively air, until the whole courtyard was full of dancing couples, and his mother came out to light a lantern just above, to let them see what they were doing.

'You'll see,' he said. 'At the end of this summer—it—it'll be quite different. I've just been to buy a violin!'

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His mother only smiled, a patient, sad smile, and turned away, murmuring: 'Well, don't let Pina see it!'

DASHING up to the attic, Tino closed the door carefully, and, taking out the violin, dusted and examined it. It was a wonderful instrument, polished and shining, with a little place on which to lean one's chin.

He raised it to his shoulders, and as he stood there, collarless, unshaven, eyes almost closed, he looked like some blind fiddler playing over some secret sorrow. Lifting the bow, he drew it caressingly across the strings. There was a grating noise, as when Pina and he moved the bed. Shocked, he stopped. This was not what happened at dances and concerts when the artists made their instruments sing lovely melodies like birds.

Again he tried. Creak! It was like the rusty hinge on the door that needed oiling. No, it was the rusty hinge on the door! The door stood open. Framed in the aperture was Pina. 'My sister was out,' she said, 'and I've been down in the room all the time.'

Tino put the violin down, hoping she had not noticed it.

'Do you realise I have to stand in that one room all day?' Pina said. Her mouth was tense and smiling as if in pain, and her eyes roamed about uncertainly. She was small and thickset. She would push Tino on, they said.

Tino flushed. 'You can—can go down to Mama's,' he said.

'Oh no,' she said. 'I've had enough of that! I've been down, and I'm not going down any more, even if they have a light and we haven't. Your father doesn't want me now.'

'How do you make that out?'

'I forgot to put the flat-iron in his bed to warm it. I'm not going down there again, I tell you. He's mad, wearing his hat in the house and sitting reading a prayer-book all day, after the life he's led. It gives me the creeps!'

Tino was happy enough in their one room. After all, they did not live in it all the time. He went out to work in the open-air, and the air of Gorizia was good. Walter went out to play, and Pina went to her mother. What was she grumbling about?

'What are you doing up here?' she asked. 'What have you got in that trunk?'

'Nothing,' he said. 'The gramophone—the one I hire out to people.'

'What else?'

She approached, and saw the bow. 'You're a fool, Tino, a fool,' she began to shout. 'Happy if you can sneak off and buy something. Last week it was a concertina, and before that the gramophone, and you can't play either of them. What's this? A violin! Oh my sacred heart! Let me see it.'

She held it up like a dead cat. 'I should never have married you,' she shouted. 'Everybody laughs at you. Look where we have to live! In one room, with no windows, a stove in the corner that smells us out even at night, and a wardrobe against the door of that empty room they will not let us use because Mrs Lotta died in it, and Mr Lotta wants to keep it exactly as it was! And instead of breaking in, or finding us another place to live, what do you do? Sit here and read funny comics, or play the gramophone, or this—this coffin-lid! Don't you know people have to be taught the violin? They don't just start playing all at once—like that!' She snapped her fingers.

'Oh?' said Tino, head on one side to hide his disappointment. His black hair was curled high on his head like a clown's as he looked at her sceptically, thoughtfully. Could it be true, he was thinking, that nobody at first knew how to play it? She was not simply trying to be kind to him? 'They do,' he said, tentatively.

'They don't, I tell you!' She stamped her feet. 'Oh, I ought to leave you altogether! Now you don't believe a thing I say, what's the use of going on?'

'I do believe you,' he brought out. 'Will you teach me then, Pina?'

'Why don't you let Walter teach you?' she shouted.

He stared at her for a moment, not understanding. Walter was pushing at her from behind. 'Come in, Walter,' he said, sharply, though there was no expression in his face.

It was a wonder to everyone how he and his wife could have had such a lovely child. He was tired of reading the surprise in their eyes, but Walter made up for everything. Tino was devoted to Walter. 'Come, s-sit down here,' he said, 'and we'll look at the comic papers.'

For a moment his wife stood looking at them both. Then she turned and went back downstairs.

Science at Your Service

PLASTICS-FILM SURFACE-PROTECTION

DURING the war the U.S. Air Force needed a 'plastics package' to protect planes lashed down as deck cargo. An American firm, well known for industrial finishes and coatings, produced a film-forming liquid, and hundreds of thousands of gallons were used for this and similar tasks before the war ended. After the war the same material was used in 'mothballing' the U.S. Reserve Fleet. It may not be as widely known that the same material is now manufactured under licence by a large British paint company for a wide range of industrial purposes. Resinous plastics substances—modified vinyl polymers, for those with some knowledge of plastics chemistry—in a volatile solvent comprise the liquid. The film-forming liquid dries to handling state in about half-an-hour and is hard in twenty-four hours. The protective film is tough, elastic, and impervious, yet it can be peeled off with little effort and without damage to the underlying surface. Various thicknesses of film can be given according to the type of protection required. The dried film is non-inflammable and resists heat up to 180° Fahr.

Manufactured goods, from large cars to small tools and parts, can be given close-fitting protection against damage in transport. In most cases other external wrapping will not be needed. Risks of chipping and scratching enamel fittings, etc., held on a site during building can be virtually eliminated. A factory whose space is limited can store finished products in the open if these have been sprayed with this plastics film. The range of uses in industry is already wide and is still enlarging.

The film may be clear, transparent, or aluminium grey; or in a range of transparent or opaque colours for special identification. Spraying is not essential in applying the liquid; articles may be dipped in it. As is the case with many new technical products, some degree of skill and experience is required to secure consistently good results. The manufacturers run special training classes for operatives at firms adopting the product, so

that this entirely new approach to packaging and surface-protection is effectively understood and soundly operated from the start.

ARCTIC EXPLOITATION

The development of resources in the far northern and frozen region has steadily made progress in this century. Canada's cropland has advanced northwards quite remarkably; and much of Britain's fresh-fish supply now comes from fishing-fields hundreds of miles farther north than was the case at the beginning of the century. One of the most dramatic ventures is now within sight of active operation—a lead and zinc mine nearly 150 miles north of the Arctic Circle. This is expected to start production in early 1956. The mine is in East Greenland. The average annual temperature is 16 degrees below freezing and 15-feet-deep snowfalls are not uncommon in the winter. A mining-town has had to be built, and the employees of the Danish mining-company will be the only inhabitants within several hundred miles. The houses have been specially constructed with a central plant for general heating. Water both for the mine and the town will be obtained from a river and conducted through electrically-heated pipes; normal below-surface piping would be impractical, for the ground stays permanently frozen to a great depth. Shipment of the mine's output by sea will be possible only for two months each year owing to the freezing of the coastal waters; but for the steady intake of mail, engineering parts, etc., an airstrip is being constructed.

The site of the mine itself is mountainous. This is not disadvantageous, for natural chambers blasted out of the side of the mountain will create cold-insulated working-space, where, with additional heating, the processes of concentrating the crude ores can be comfortably operated. It is expected that some 20,000 tons of concentrated ores will be produced each year. This combination of courage in exploration and boldness in technology is a great tribute to a small European nation like Denmark.

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL

EASIER IRONING

Ironing has never been one of the lighter domestic chores. When the old steel irons had to be heated at intervals on fires or gas-rings, a good deal of to-and-fro moving and lifting was involved. With to-day's continuously-heated plug-in irons, the iron must still be picked up, moved to a stand, and set down again whenever the clothes being ironed have to be readjusted or when there is any interruption to the task itself. It is estimated that in one hour of ironing a total weight of one ton is raised and lowered. A new British-made electric-iron, of revolutionary design, reduces the work in ironing and also adds to its safety. No stand for the hot iron in temporary disuse is needed, for the iron automatically tips up, so that its hotplate cannot make contact with the level surface on which the iron is resting. This is simply a matter of the iron's centre of gravity. It must assume a resting position on the cool, non-heated heel-plate. When ironing, however, the hotplate is quite easily kept upon the clothes' surface by the normal handle-gripping pressure. The removal of the user's hand from the iron immediately causes it to assume the safe cold heel-plate resting position. Thus all risk of burning or scorching fabrics is eliminated—no sudden and prolonged interruption in ironing can have serious consequences. The total effort and time lost in moving the iron to and from a stand while ironing is also eliminated.

The outstanding merit of this advance in design has not lessened the maker's attention to other technical features. The hotplate is thermostatically controlled by a dial which can be set for rayon, silk, wool, cotton, and linen, the temperature range being from 240° to 450° Fahrenheit. Consumption of power is low—750 watts—but the hotplate reaches required temperatures very swiftly. The thermostat has an indicator light. The hotplate, which has 24 square inches of working-surface, is made of a non-tarnishing alloy. The body of the iron is in a synthetic enamel finish in pale blue, green, or primrose. A.C. voltage ranges of 110-125, 200-220, and 230-250 are covered; a D.C. model is not made. Lastly, it must be said that the iron is surprisingly inexpensive. It has been fully tested in operation by the writer, and can be most confidently recommended. It might be added that the low effort-demand made by this iron makes it particularly useful for elderly people or invalids, whose hand-power is limited.

REFLECTIVE TAPE AND SHEETING FOR ROAD-SAFETY

An American product now being manufactured in this country is a reflective tape or sheeting that greatly increases night-time visibility on the roads. Some motorists may have occasionally seen a car ahead of them which seems to have a band of red neon-lighting stretching across its rear bumper; if so, this is simply the effect of a car-wide strip of the red reflective tape. The same material in sheet form has been used for some years in U.S. traffic-signs and road-safety aids. Under approaching headlights the tape or sheeting is visible for as much as half-a-mile. Applied to the rear of a car it gives a clear indication of the vehicle's width, and tests have shown that the rear of such a car may be seen 70 per cent sooner than a car equipped only with standard tail-lights. It is claimed to be two hundred times brighter in darkness than ordinary white-painted surfaces. The tape can be easily applied, and, once it is on, it stays firmly in position. It is waterproof, and the colour is fast, so there is no risk of decline in effectiveness through normal exposure. The tape is sold in rolls 1 inch wide and 24 inches long. Police motorcyclists in one large city constabulary region in England have been ordered to wear the sheeting form on their crash-helmets.

A GARAGE-DOOR OPENER

An automatic garage-door opening system has recently been placed on the market. It enables the driver to open the doors by pushing a button on a pillar in the drive placed so that it is within arms-reach of the driving-seat. The system is applicable only to double doors of the hinged type. The device is fitted with several precautionary controls. There is an automatic-clutch effect that ensures that door-opening ceases to operate if there is any obstruction to the movement. A key switch is included in the system, so that unauthorised opening of the doors is prevented. If it is desired to operate the opener from more than one position, additional push-button units are available. As the doors open, a lamp, fitted in the main unit, lights up the garage and the drive. The device can be fitted by the car-owner himself. Obviously an automatic system of this kind is not marketable for a few shillings, but the price—about half that of a medium-sized refrigerator—seems reasonable.

SCIENCE AT YOUR SERVICE

PREVENTING AND CHECKING RUST

When a few years ago certain ancient iron-made articles were found buried in soil, their freedom from expectable rust was seen to be remarkable. The explanation finally reached was that the site was that of an old tannery and the soil had a high content of tannates and further research showed that tannates could protect iron against rust. Now a tanning company has marketed a vegetable extract for use in anti-rust treatment of ironwork. It may be brush or spray applied as a priming-coat, to be followed by ordinary painting. In some cases iron articles can be rust-protected by dipping them in the liquid for about an hour. Water-carrying systems—e.g., heating systems, etc., can be protected from internal rusting by mixing the liquid with the circulation water. The extract contains about 25 per cent of tanning substance. Existential rust is turned into iron tannate and iron surfaces are protected by formation of a film of tannate. The product is available in various units from $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint cans to 20-gallon drums.

AN ELECTRIC FRYING-PAN

A well-known manufacturer of electrical goods has introduced what is claimed to be the first British frying-pan with its own, built-in, heating-unit. It should be connected to a 3-pin earthed lighting or power socket, and heat-control is determined by a thermostat housed in the pan's handle; the handle also carries a panel stating the required temperature for various fried dishes. The pan itself is made of aluminium, and is fitted with plastic feet so that it can be stood and used on a table. Covers, made either of heat-resistant glass or aluminium, and which enable the pan to be used for baking, stewing roasting, etc., are available as accessories. Special demonstrations of this novel cooking-utensil are taking place in many larger towns. The same type of appliance has already been introduced into the United States with considerable success. It would certainly seem to be of interest to occupiers of bed-and-breakfast flatlets.

TO CORRESPONDENTS who wish fuller information regarding new inventions, publications, etc. mentioned here, addresses will be furnished, when possible, if (and only if) a stamped addressed envelope or postcard for a reply be sent to the Editor, *Chambers's Journal*, 11 Thistle Street, Edinburgh. To avoid delays, requests of this kind from correspondents abroad will be forwarded to the manufacturer or agent if stamps, postal orders, or imperial or international reply coupons are enclosed for the purpose. The issue of the *Journal* and the heading of the paragraph in which the object of inquiry is described should be given in order to facilitate reference.

A BETTER CISTERN-FLOAT

One of the main weaknesses of flush cisterns is the float, whose position controls water-level and thus prevents perpetual inflow and overflow pipe dripping. Metal floats suffer from corrosion; the seams of metal floats may become sources of leakage, in which case the ability to float is eventually lost; floats may become dented. The war and post-war tendency for water authorities in some areas to chlorinate supplies has steadily increased the risk of float corrosion. The idea of using plastics to produce cistern-floats is not entirely new, but the latest development of this kind—a seamless float made from polythene—certainly deserves special description. With the 4½-inch metal and spherical float, ball-valve arms must often be bent in order to keep the float clear of the sides of the cistern and the flushing mechanism. The lighter weight of polythene has enabled a smaller float to be used and one with slight divergence from the traditional spherical shape. These floats are mechanically air-blown from polythene tubing; this subjection to high internal pressure during manufacture ensures freedom from weaknesses that could lead in normal use to leakage or fracture. Polythene is acid-resisting and is, of course, not subject to corrosion.

A LIGHT-WEIGHT VACUUM-CLEANER

A Belgian vacuum-cleaner is now being marketed in this country, and perhaps its most striking feature is its light weight, 4½ pounds approximately. It can be used in the normal manner with a long handle, or the handle may be detached and the working-head used as a hand-cleaner. Various accessories available include an oval sweeping-brush, a rubber-combed rug-cleaning nozzle, a knee-jointed polishing-pad, and a vapourising unit that can be used for spraying rooms or cupboards with disinfectant or deodorant from a soaked pad. The fast-running motor is suppressed against causing radio-interference. The price is well in line with those for other vacuum-cleaners, and there seems little doubt that the versatility of such a light machine will arouse plenty of interest among housewives.

Better Paeonies

THE paeony has often been referred to as the queen of the garden flowers, and, with its masses of fragrant blooms, it can certainly claim to be one of the aristocrats. There is nothing very difficult about its cultivation, and the only drawback is that it takes some time before coming into full flowering. You may have to wait two or three years after planting a paeony before it blooms well, and, if your soil is heavy, perhaps even longer!

The roots of the paeony are thick and tuberous, while the leaves are large and deeply-divided. The stems are a good length, and the best varieties for a display are those with showy large flowers. It is never a good plan to try too deep planting, for the roots resent it, and this may prevent the flowers from ever blooming. The plants must be fed with potash and phosphates to encourage flowering.

The ideal soil is a rich loam, neutral or slightly alkaline. If yours tends to be heavy, this can be helped by adding really-well-rotted vegetable compost or sedge-peat now, plus dressings of carbonate of lime at 4 oz. to the square yard in February. An open situation should be chosen and the compost, etc., dug in before planting. Never put the plants near trees, or you will have trouble, and ensure drainage, or the roots will rot off in the winter through botrytis. If your soil happens to be light, it will need a rolling after the first cultivations, followed by a harrowing. After this, the organic fertiliser will be applied, and I would recommend a good fish-manure used at 3 oz. to the square yard. You will thus be giving the potash and phosphates required by these plants in a form slowly assimilated.

The planting may be carried out as soon as the land is really clean—free from perennial weeds, etc. Propagation by division of roots may be done in September, when the summer growth has been completed and the winter buds have formed on the crown, but, if the ground is still open, splitting can be carried out in December. I would not recommend spring planting, as this often causes a check in the growth of the plants. Growers in the North of England favour deep planting; in America, the planting is often 3 inches *below*

ground-level, with a heavy top-dressing in addition, usually of straw. This mulch is put on before the winter sets in.

If you intend to leave your paeonies down for about ten years, they will need careful attention. Remove all the old leaves and stems each November or December and put them on the compost-heap to rot down for manure. Use an activator on the heap, such as a fish-manure; this will prevent any disease from being carried over and the pest and disease spores will be killed by the heat engendered in the heap. I would recommend readers in the Midlands and South to plant so that the crowns are just at ground-level, and make them very firm. If you do this work now, be sure that you cover the soil afterwards with sedge-peat as a top-dressing. Plant firmly when the ground is not frozen.

I would like to draw your attention to a few of my favourite varieties. There is *P. cambessedesii*, which has attractive foliage and flowers of a beautiful pink. *P. emodi* has flowers 4 inches across and of a pure white, while *P. mollis* is bright crimson, having leaves of dull green, glaucous underneath. A good June variety is *P. wittmandiana*, which has primrose-yellow flowers, freely produced.

Other varieties that are worth while considering are Bowl of Beauty; the guard-petals are of a fuchsia-rose and the full centre is pale lemon; the only thing against this variety is its price. Border Gem should be considered; the outer petals are shrimp-red and the inner petals chartreuse-green. Then there is Adolph Rousseau, a dark red, with golden anthers, and Lady Alexander Duff, a delicate soft pink.

Most of the doubles are more or less fragrant, and I think the rose-sweet fragrance is more noticeable in the lighter-coloured varieties, while others have that interesting spicy odour. The flowering season lasts from about the end of May until early July.

I shall be glad to help readers with their gardening problems. Write to me through the Editor, kindly enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for the reply.

W. E. SHEWELL-COOPER, M.B.E., N.D.H.

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